

THE ARGOSY.

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COURT NETHERLEIGH.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XIII.

FOLLY.

THERE is no misfortune on earth so great as that of a troubled conscience: there is nothing that will wear the spirits and the frame like a burdensome secret that may not be told. It will blanch the cheek and sicken the heart; it will render the day a terror and the bed weary; so that the unhappy victim will be tempted to say with Job: When shall I arise and the night be gone? He is full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day: his sleep is scared with dreams and terrified with visions.

Had Mrs. Oscar Dalrymple been of a different temperament, this unhappy state of mind would have been hers. But she had no very deep feeling. Troubled in a degree she undoubtedly was. That terrible secret, the debts she had incurred, lay on her mind always in a greater or a less degree; for she knew that her husband when he paid them would be half ruined; certainly crippled for years.

Another season had come round and was at its height; and Mr. and Mrs. Dalrymple had again come up to it. The past autumn and winter had been spent at Moat Grange, which Selina found insufferably dull, and where her chief solace and recreation consisted in looking over her beautiful and extensive wardrobe, and trying on portions of it in private. A very negative sort of enjoyment. Where was the use of possessing these divine dresses and adjuncts, when no field was afforded for their display? Selina had ventured to wear one costly robe on a certain evening that she dined at Court Netherleigh, and was severely taken to task by her mother, who was the only other guest, and by Miss Upton, for appearing in such "finery." They asked her what she meant by such extravagance. And that before Oscar too! Selina blushed a little and laughed it

off: but she mentally wondered what would have been said had she put on her very finest, or if they saw the stock at home.

During the winter Selina had a fever, brought on, it was thought, from exposing herself unduly to damp. She grew better, but was somewhat delicate and very capricious. Oscar, loving her intensely, grew to humour her fancies and to pet her as if she were a spoiled child. Her conscience reproached her now and then for the tacit deceit she was enacting, in thus suffering him to live in blissful ignorance of their true position; but on the whole it did not trouble her greatly. Alice, her sensitive sister, would have died under it; Selina contrived to exist very comfortably.

"If you found out that I had done anything dreadfully wrong, would you quite kill me, Oscar?" she playfully said to him one day.

"Dare say I should," answered Oscar, putting on a face of mock-severity. "Might depend, perhaps, upon what the thing was."

"Ah, no; you'd just scold me for five minutes, and then kiss and be friends. I always said you'd never turn out to be an old griffin."

That was the nearest approach Selina ever made towards confessing to her husband. And Oscar had but looked upon it as a bit of passing pleasantry.

Alice Dalrymple had left her mother's house to become companion to Lady Sarah Hope. During a week's visit that Colonel Hope and his wife made to Miss Upton in the autumn—it was soon after they had got into their new house in London—Alice had also been staying at Court Netherleigh. One day Lady Sarah chanced to say she wished she could find some nice, young gentlewoman, who would come to her in the capacity of companion; upon which Alice said, "Would you take me?" "Ay, and be glad to get you," returned Lady Sarah, supposing that Alice had spoken in jest. Alice, however, was in earnest. She could not bear to be living on the charity of Oscar Dalrymple, and she quite believed that her mother, devoted to the care of her poultry, her birds, and her flowers, would not miss her. So the bargain was struck. "And please remember, Lady Sarah, that I come to you entirely *as* companion, prepared to fulfil all a companion's duties, and not merely as a visitor," Alice gravely said, and she meant it.

Selina was vexed when she heard of the arrangement. She went straight down to her mother's cottage, and upbraided Alice sharply. "It is lowering us all," she said to her. "A companion is next door to a servant; everybody knows that. It will be just a disgrace to the name of Dalrymple."

"Very well, Selina; then, as you think that, I will drop the name," returned Alice. "I was christened Alice Seaton, you know, after my godmother, and I will be called Miss Seaton at Lady Sarah's."

"Stuff and nonsense, child!" retorted Selina. "You may call yourself Seaton all the world over, but all the world will know still that you are Alice Dalrymple."

Alice entered upon her new home in London, and gravely told everybody in it that she wished to be called by her second name, Seaton. Lady Sarah laughed, and promised to humour her as often as she could recollect. In December, Colonel Hope formally adopted his nephew, Gerard. The young man threw up his post in the red-tape office (not at all a wise thing to do), and took up his abode with his uncle. They all went down to the Colonel's place in Gloucestershire to spend Christmas, including Frances Chenevix, who almost seemed to have been as much adopted as Gerard, so frequently was she staying with them. Christmas passed, they came to London again, and things went on smoothly and gaily until just before Easter, when a fracas occurred. Gerard Hope contrived in some way to offend the Colonel and Lady Sarah so implacably that they discarded him, and the Colonel, hot and peppery, turned him out of the house. They went again into Gloucestershire for Easter, Alice with them as companion and Frances as a guest; but not Gerard. In fact, so far as one might judge, he was discarded for ever.

The sweet month of June came round again, and the London season, as I have said, was at its height. Amidst those who were plunging headlong into its vanities was Selina Dalrymple. She had coaxed, and begged, and prayed her husband to give her just another month or two of it this year, assuring him she should die if he did not. And Oscar, though wincing at the cost, knowing well he could not and ought not to afford it, at length gave in. It appeared that he could deny her nothing.

It may be questioned, however, whether Selina enjoyed it quite as much as she had the last. The visiting and the gaiety and the homage were as captivating as ever, but she lived in a kind of terror; for Madame Damereau was pressing for the payment of her account. If *that* came to Oscar's knowledge, he would not only do to her, she hardly knew what, perhaps even box her ears, but he would be quite certain to carry her forthwith from this delightful London life to that awful prison, Moat Grange, at Netherleigh.

One afternoon Oscar was turning out of his temporary home in Berkeley Street—for they had the same rooms as last year—when he saw coming towards him a young lady who walked a little lame. It was Alice Dalrymple."

"Ah, Alice!" he cried. "Have you come to London?"

"Yes," she replied. "The Colonel is better, and we left Gloucestershire yesterday. Is Selina at home?"

"She is, for a wonder. Waiting for somebody she intends to go out with."

"How is she?"

"I cannot tell you how she is. Rather strange, it seems to me."

"Strange!"

"Take my arm, Alice, and walk with me a few paces. There's something the matter with Selina, and I cannot make it out," con-

tinued Mr. Dalrymple. "She acts for all the world as if she had committed some crime. I told her so the other day."

"Acts in what way?" cried Alice.

"She's frightened at her own shadow. When the post used to come in at the Grange she would watch for the boy, dart down the path and seize the letters, as if she feared I might read the directions of hers. When she was recovering from that fever, and I would take her letters in to her, she more than once became blanched and scared. Often I ask her questions, or address remarks to her, and she is buried in her own thoughts, and does not hear me. She starts and moans in her sleep; twice lately I have awakened in the middle of the night and found her gone from the bed and pacing the dressing-room."

"You alarm me," exclaimed Alice. "What can it be?"

"I can only suppose that her nerves are overwrought with all these follies she is plunged into. It is nothing but turmoil and excitement; turmoil and excitement from day to day. I was a fool to come here again this year, and that's the truth."

"Selina had always led so very quiet a life," murmured Alice.

"Of course she had; and it has been a wonderful change for her; enough to upset the nervous system of a delicate woman. Selina has not been too strong since she had that fever."

"She ought to keep more quiet."

"She ought; but she will not. Before we came up I told her she must not do as she did last year; and I thought she did not mean to. Alice, she is mad after these gay frivolities; worse than she was last summer, I do believe—and that need not be. I wished not to come; I told Selina why—the expense, and other reasons—but she would. She *would*, Alice. I wonder what it is that chains her mind to this Babel of a city. I hate it. Go you in and see her, Alice. I can't stay now, for I have an appointment."

Mrs. Dalrymple was in her bedroom when Alice entered, dressed, and waiting to go out: dressed with an elegance regardless of expense.

"Good gracious, child, is it you!" she exclaimed.

When the first moments of meeting had passed, Alice sat down and looked at her sister: her cheek was thin, and its brilliant bloom told more of hectic than of health.

"Selina!" exclaimed Alice, "what is the matter? You are much altered."

"Am I? People do alter. You are altered. You look ill."

"Not more so than usual," replied Alice. "I get weaker with time. But you are ill: I can see it. You look as if you had something preying on your mind."

"Nonsense, Alice. You are fanciful."

"What is it?" persisted Alice.

"If I have, your knowing it would do me no good, and would

worry you. And yet," added Mrs. Dalrymple, "I think I will tell you. I have felt lately, Alice, that I must tell somebody."

Alice laid gentle hold of her. "Let us sit down on the sofa, as we used to sit together at the Grange, when we were really sisters. But, Selina, if you have wanted a confidant in any grief, who so fit to be that as your husband?"

"He!" cried Selina—"he! It is the dread of his knowing it—the anxiety I am in, daily and hourly, to keep it from him—that is wearing me out. Sometimes I say to myself, 'What if I put an end to it all, as Robert did?'"

Alice was accustomed to the random figures of speech her sister was at moments given to use; nevertheless her heart stood still.

"What is it that you have done, Selina?"

"Ruined Oscar."

"Ruined Oscar!"

"And ruined myself with him," added Selina in a reckless tone, as she took off her bonnet with a jerk and let it lie in her lap. "I have contracted debts that neither he nor I can pay, thousands upon thousands; and the worry of it, the constant, incessant dread of discovery, is rendering my life a—I will not *say* what—upon earth."

"Debts! thousands upon thousands!" confusedly uttered Alice.

"It is so."

"How did you contract them? Not as—as—Robert did? Surely that infatuation is not come upon you?"

"No. But that infatuation, as you call it, is in fashion in our circles just now. I could tell you of one young lady, whom you know, who amuses herself with it pretty largely."

"A young lady!"

"She is younger than I am—but she's married," returned Selina; and the young lady in question was the Lady Adela Grubb. "My embarrassment arises from a love of pretty gowns," she added lightly; for it was not possible for Selina Dalrymple to maintain a tragic mood many minutes together. "Damereau's bill for last season was between three and four thousand pounds. It is over four thousand now."

Alice Dalrymple felt bewildered. "It is not possible for one person to owe all that in a year, Selina!"

"Not possible?" repeated Mrs. Dalrymple. "Some of my friends spend double—treble—four times what I do."

"And so their example led you on?" cried Alice presently, waking up from a whirlpool of thought.

"Something led me on. If one is in the world one must dress."

"No, Selina: not as you have done. Not to ruin. If people have but a small income they dress accordingly."

"And make a sight of themselves. I don't choose to."

"Better that, and have peace of mind," remarked Alice.

"Peace of mind! Oh, I don't know where that is to be found now a-days."

"I hope you will find it, Selina. How much do you say you owe?"

"There's four thousand to Damereau, and ——"

"Who is Damereau?"

"Goodness me, Alice; if you never did spend a season in town, you ought to know who she is, without asking. Madame Damereau's the great milliner and dressmaker; everybody goes to her."

"I remember now. Lady Sarah has her things elsewhere."

"Then I owe for India shawls, and lace, and jewels, and furs and things. I owe six thousand pounds if I owe a farthing."

"What a sum!" echoed Alice, aghast. "Six thousand pounds?"

"Ay, you may well repeat it! Which of the queens was it who said that when she died the name of Calais would be found engraven on her heart? Mary, I think. Were I to die, those two words, 'six thousand,' would be found engraven on mine. They are never absent from me. I see them written up in figures in my dreams; I see them always; in the ball-room, at the opera, in the park, they are buzzing in my ears; when I wake from my troubled sleep they come rushing over me, and I start from my bed to escape them. I am not at all sure that it won't turn out to be seven thousand," candidly added Mrs. Dalrymple.

"You must have dressed in silver and gold," said poor Alice.

"No: only in things that cost it: such things as these," said Mrs. Dalrymple, pulling at her bonnet with both hands, in irritation so passionate that it was torn in two.

"Oh, pray! pray!" Alice interposed, but too late to prevent the catastrophe. "Your beautiful bonnet! Selina, it must have cost three or four guineas. What a waste!"

"Tush!" peevishly replied Mrs. Dalrymple, flinging the wrecks to the middle of the room. "A bonnet more or less—what does it matter?"

Alice sat in thought; looking very pained, very perplexed. "It appears to me that you are on a wrong course altogether, Selina. The past is past; but you might strive to redeem it."

"Strive against a whirlpool," sarcastically responded Selina.

"You are getting deeper into it: by your own admission, you are having new things every day. It is adding fuel to fire."

"I can't go naked."

"But you must have a large stock of dresses by you."

"Do you think I would appear in last year's things? I can't and I won't. You do not understand these matters, Alice."

"Then you ought not to 'appear' at all. You should have stopped at the Grange."

"As good be in a nunnery. Once you have been initiated into the delights of a London season, you can but come back to it. Fancy my stopping at that mouldy old Grange!"

"What is to be the end of all this?" lamented Alice.

"Ah, that's it! The End. One does not know, you see, how soon

it may come. I'd not so much mind if I could get all the season first. The torment of it is, that Damereau is pressing for her bill. She is throwing out hints that she can't supply me any longer on credit—and what on earth am I to do if she won't? What a shame it is that there should be so much worry in the world!"

"The greatest portion of it is of our own creating, Selina. And no worry ought to have the power very seriously to disturb our peace," the younger sister continued, in a whisper.

"Now, Alice, you are going to bring up some of those religious notions of yours! They will be lost upon me. One cannot have one's body in this world and one's heart in the next."

"Oh, yes we can," said Alice, earnestly. "We ——"

"Well, I don't suppose I am going into the next yet, unless I torment myself out of this one; so don't go on about it," was Selina's graceless reply. But as Alice rose to leave, her mood changed.

"Forgive my fractiousness, Alice; indeed, you would excuse it if you only knew how bothered and miserable I am. It makes me cross with myself and with other people."

"Ma'am," interrupted Ann, Mrs. Dalrymple's maid, "Lady Burnham is at the door, waiting for you."

"I am not going out to-day," answered her mistress, rising. "I have changed my mind."

"Oh, my patience!" uttered the maid, "what's this? Why, ma'am, it's never your bonnet?"

No man is a hero to his valet-de-chambre: I fear the same may be said of woman. "Bother the bonnet," was the undignified reply of Mrs. Dalrymple, as she flung the pieces further away with her foot. Ann humbly followed them to the far-off corner, and there took them into her hands. "Reach me another bonnet," said her mistress; "I think I will go, after all. What's the use of staying indoors?"

"Which bonnet, ma'am?"

"Oh, I don't know. Bring some out."

An array of bonnets, new and costly, were displayed for Mrs. Dalrymple's difficult choice. Alice, to whom all this was as a revelation, took her departure with uplifted hands and a shrinking heart.

Mrs. Dalrymple went downstairs, and took her seat in Lady Burnham's carriage. The latter, an extremely wealthy woman, full of pleasurable excitement, imparted some particulars she had learnt of the marriage festivities about to be held in a family of their acquaintance, to which they were both invited. Lady Burnham was then on her road to Damereau's to order a suitable toilette for it, one that would eclipse everybody's but the bride's. Selina, in listening, forgot her cares: when carried out of herself by the excitement of preparing for these pomps and vanities, she generally did so forget. But only then. In the enacting of the pomps and vanities

themselves, when they were before her in all their glory, and she made one of the bedizened crowd, her nightmare would return to her; the skeleton in the closet would, at those festive times, be exceeding prominent and bare. The reader may be a philosopher, a grave old F.R.S., very learned in searching out cause and effect, and so be able to account for this. I am not.

Selina's mouth watered as she listened to Lady Burnham's description of what she meant to wear herself at the wedding, and what she recommended to Selina: and the carriage stopped at Madame Damereau's. Mrs. Dalrymple's orders were quite moderate to-day—only amounting to about ninety pounds.

Was she quite silly? the reader will ask. Well, not more so than many another thoughtless woman.

Madame Damereau took the order as politely and carefully as though Mrs. Oscar Dalrymple had been made of bank notes and gold. She knew better manners—and better policy, too—than to make any objection before others of her clientèle. But that same evening, when Selina was dressing, she was told that a lady who gave the name of Cooper wished to see her. Selina knew that there was a Mrs. Cooper in the establishment of Madame Damereau, a partner, she fancied, or book-keeper, something of that. She had seen her once or twice; a ladylike woman who had been reduced.

"Let Mrs. Cooper come up here," she said to the maid. And Mrs. Cooper entered the bedroom.

"I come from Madame Damereau's," she began, taking the chair that Selina pointed to. "She hopes ——"

"For goodness sake speak low!" interrupted Selina, in ill-concealed terror. "Mr. Dalrymple is only in his dressing-room, and I do not wish him to hear all my private affairs. These London walls are thin. She wants money, I suppose."

"She hopes, madam, that you will make it convenient to let her have some," said Mrs. Cooper, sinking her voice to a whisper. "If it were only a few hundred pounds," she said. "That is but trifling, compared with the whole sum, which amounts now to ——"

"Oh, I know what it amounts to; I can guess it, near enough," hastily interposed Mrs. Dalrymple. "In the course of a week or two I will see what I can do."

Poor Selina, at her wits' end for excuses, had said "in the course of a week or two" so many times now, that Madame Damereau was tired of hearing the phrase.

Mrs. Cooper hesitated, not much liking her errand. "She bade me say, madam, that she was extremely sorry to cause inconvenience, but that she cannot execute the order you gave to-day unless she previously receives some money."

"Not execute it!" repeated Selina, with flashing eyes. "What do you mean by saying such a thing to me?"

"Madam, I am but the agent of Madame Damereau. I can only speak as she bids me."

"True," answered Selina, softening; "it is not your fault. But I must have the things. You will get them for me, will you not?" she said, in an accent of entreaty, feeling that she was speaking to a gentlewoman, although one who but held a situation at a milliner's. "Oh, pray use your influence! get her to let me have them."

Mrs. Cooper stood in distress, for hers was one of those refined spirits that cannot bear to cause, or to witness, pain. "If it depended upon me, indeed you should have them," she answered, "but I have no influence of that nature with Madame Damereau. She would not allow the slightest interference between her and her ladies: were I to attempt it I might lose my place in her house, and be turned out again to struggle with the world."

"Has it been a harsh world to you?" inquired Selina, pityingly.

"Oh, yes," was Mrs. Cooper's answer, "or I should not be where I am now. And I am thankful to be there," she hastily added: "I would not seem ungrateful for the mercy that has followed me in my misfortunes."

"I think misfortunes are the lot of all," spoke Selina. "What can I do to induce Madame Damereau to furnish me with these things?"

"Perhaps you had better call and see her yourself, madam," replied Mrs. Cooper, relapsing into her ostensible position. "I will try and say a word to her to-night that may prepare her. She has a good heart."

"I will see her to-morrow. Thank you," replied Mrs. Dalrymple, ringing for Mrs. Cooper to be shown out.

Selina finished dressing and went forth to the evening's gaiety with what spirits she had. On the following day she proceeded to Madame Damereau's at an early hour, before any other of the clientèle would be likely to appear. But the interview, although Mrs. Cooper had said as much as she dared, was not productive of good. Madame had gradually learnt the true position of Oscar Dalrymple, that he was a very poor man instead of a rich one; she feared she might have trouble over her amount, and was obstinate and obdurate. Not exactly insolent: she was never that, to her customers' faces: but she and Mrs. Dalrymple both lost their temper, and the latter was impolitic enough to say some cutting things, not only in disparagement of Madame's goods, but about the "cheating prices" she had been charged. Madame Damereau's face turned green, and the interview ended by her stating that if some money was not immediately furnished her, she should sue Mr. Dalrymple for the whole. Selina went away sick at heart; for she read determination on the incensed lips of the Frenchwoman.

CHAPTER XIV.

LADY ADELA.

"How sly Mary has been!"

The above exclamation spoken by Lady Adela Grubb in a kind of resentful tone, as she read a letter while sipping her coffee, caused her husband to look up. He sat at the opposite end of the breakfast table, attractive with its silver and its flowers and its beautiful Worcester china.

"Are you speaking of your sister Mary?" he asked. "What has she done?"

Any answer to this question Lady Adela did not condescend to give. Unless the tossing of the letter across the table to him could be called one—and she did it with a gesture of scorn. The letter, a short one, came from Miss Upton, of Court Netherleigh.

"MY DEAR ADELA,—I have a little business to transact in London to-morrow, and will take luncheon with you at one o'clock, if quite convenient. Tell your husband, with my kind regards, that I hope to see him also—if he can spare an hour from that exacting place of his, Leadenhall Street. So I am to have your sister Mary as a neighbour, after all!—Your sincere friend,

"MARGERY UPTON."

"Which means, I presume, that Mary is to marry Cleveland," remarked Mr. Grubb, as he read the concluding sentence.

"Stupid thing! I told her weeks ago she was flirting with him."

"Nay, not flirting, Adela. Cleveland is not capable of that."

Adela tossed her head. How lovely she looked! fair as the fresh summer morning.

"She was flirting, though. And he would flirt if he were not too old. Parsons, as a rule, flirt more than laymen. She must be hard up for a husband to take *him*. He has a house full of children!"

"I daresay she likes him," said Mr. Grubb.

"Oh, nonsense! One only point could be urged in his favour—that he is a patrician."

"That he is what?" cried Mr. Grubb, who was drinking his coffee at the moment, and did not hear the word.

"A patrician. Not a plebeian."

The offensive stress laid by Adela on the last word, the marked scorn sitting on her lips, brought a flush to her husband's brow. Nothing seemed to afford her so much gratification as the throwing out these lance-shafts to Mr. Grubb, on what she was pleased to term his plebeian origin.

"Do you wish for more coffee?" she asked, ungraciously.

"No. I have not time for it. I must make the best of my way into the city if I am to get back to luncheon."

"There is not the least necessity for you to get back," was her slighting remark. "You will not be missed if you don't come."

"By yourself, no. I am aware of that. But I do not care to be so lacking in common courtesy as to disregard the expressed wish of Miss Upton."

"She may have expressed it out of mere politeness."

"Miss Upton is not one to express a wish out of mere politeness," replied Mr. Grubb, as he gathered up some papers of his that were by the side of his plate. "Besides, I shall like to see her."

Approaching his wife, who had taken up the *Morning Post*, he stood over her. "Good-bye, Adela," he said; and bent to kiss her cheek.

"Oh, good-bye," she retorted, in a curt tone, and jerked her cheek away from his very lips.

He went away with a suppressed sigh. This line of treatment had been dealt out to him so long now that he had become inured to it. It was none the less bitter, though, for that.

Adela, dropping the newspaper and picking up a rose from one of the glasses on the breakfast-table, went to the window to see whether it looked very hot, for she wanted to walk to her mother's and hear about Mary's contemplated marriage. She saw her husband cross the square. For some reason he was crossing it on foot, his close carriage slowly following him: on very hot days he rarely used an open one. What a fine, noble-looking man he was! what a face of goodness and beauty was his!—how few could compare with him. At odd moments this would even strike Adela; it struck her now; and a flash of something like pride in him darted into her heart.

Ah! she saw now why he had walked across the square instead of getting into his carriage at the door: her father was advancing towards him. The two met, shook hands, stood for a few moments talking, and then Lord Acorn put his arm within his son-in-law's, and they turned the corner together.

"Papa wants more money of him," thought Adela. "It's rather too bad, I must say. But that Leadenhall Street is just a mine of wealth."

For now and again, ever since the marriage, Lord Acorn had come with his troubles and embarrassments to Mr. Grubb, who seldom refused to assist him.

As the clock was striking one that day, they sat down to lunch: Miss Upton, who had just arrived, Mr. Grubb, and Lady Adela. Miss Upton never took the meal later if she could help it. Indeed, at home she took it at twelve. Her breakfast hour was eight precisely, and by twelve she was ready for luncheon. Lady Acorn came in as they were sitting down, threw her bonnet on a chair, and sat down with them. Hearing that Miss Upton would be there, she had come, uninvited, to meet her.

"How early you went out, mamma!" cried Adela, in rather an aggrieved tone. For, when she reached Chenevix House that

morning, she found her mother and sisters had already left it: so that she had heard no particulars at all about Lady Mary's proposed wedding, not even whether there was certainly to be one, and Adela had her curiosity upon the subject.

"We went shopping," answered Lady Acorn. "One likes to do that before the heat of the day comes on. Do you know that Mr. Cleveland is going to marry again, Margery?" she added abruptly, looking across the table at Miss Upton.

"Yes, I knew it. He came to the Court yesterday morning to tell me of it. I think Mary will make him a good wife."

"She has courage," said Mr. Grubb, with a pleasant laugh. "How many children are there?—Ten?"

"No. Eight. And they are of all ages; from seven, up to four-and-twenty," added Miss Upton.

Lady Acorn was nodding her head, in emphatic acquiescence to Mr. Grubb's remark. "I told Mary she had the courage of Job, when the thing first came to my ears. Eight children and a poor country rector! Young women are ready to marry a broomstick when they get to Mary's age, if the chance falls in their way."

"Had Job so much courage, mamma?" put in Adela.

"Courage, or patience, or some such virtue. It is not I that would have taken an old widower with a flock of young ones," continued the Countess, in her plain-speaking tartness.

"You will get rid of us all in time, mamma," observed Adela.

"It entails trouble enough," was her mother's ungracious rejoinder. "I am quite done over with heat and fatigue now—going about from one place to another after Mary's things. Gowns and bonnets and slips and mantles, and all the rest of it! Girls are so exacting when they are going to marry: they must have this and they must have that, and Mary is no exception. One would think she had picked up a duke."

"It is natural they should be," observed Miss Upton.

"But it's not the less ridiculous," retorted the Countess. "One thing I must say—that Tom Cleveland is showing himself in desperate haste to take another wife."

"The haste is for his children's sake," said Miss Upton; "be very sure of that, Betsy. 'I must have some one to control and train them; since my poor wife's death the girls have run wild,' he said to me yesterday, when he told me about Mary, and the tears were almost running down his cheeks."

"It is a great charge," spoke Mr. Grubb. "I mean for Lady Mary."

"It is," acquiesced Miss Upton. "But I hope—I think—she will be found equal to it, and will prove a good stepmother. That she understands the responsibility she is undertaking, and has counted the cost, I am sure of, by what she said in a long letter I received from her this morning."

"It is to be hoped she will have no children of her own," struck

in Lady Acorn. "Many a woman makes a good stepmother until her own babies come. After that ——"

"After that—what?" asked Miss Upton, for Lady Acorn had stopped abruptly.

"After that, she thinks of her own children and not of the first wife's. And sometimes the poor things get hardly dealt by."

"And when is the wedding-day to be?" asked Adela.

"The day after twelve months shall have elapsed since the death of the first Mrs. Cleveland; or in as short a time subsequent to that day as may be convenient to me and the milliners," laughed Lady Acorn.

"That will make it sometime in August, mamma?"

"Yes, in August."

"Adela, you must give them a substantial present—something worth having," said Mr. Grubb to his wife.

"Is Damereau to furnish the wedding dresses?" questioned Adela, ignoring her husband's remark rather too pointedly, and addressing her mother.

"Damereau!" shrieked the Countess. "Not if I know it. We have been to plain Mrs. Wilson. Damereau gets dearer every day. She is all very well for those who have a long purse: mine's a short one."

At the close of the luncheon, Miss Upton said she must take her departure; she had commissions to do. A fly waited for her at the door.

"You should use one of Adela's carriages," said Mr. Grubb, as he took her down to it.

"Ah, thank you; I know you and she would lend it to me with hearty good-will; but I like, you see, to be independent," was Miss Upton's answer. "I have employed the same fly and the same man for years. When I am coming to London I write to him previously, and he holds himself at my services for the day."

"Is there anything I can do for you?" asked Mr. Grubb, as he placed her comfortably in the closed fly.

"Nothing. Unless you will get in and ride a little way with me. I am going first to a shop in the Strand. Perhaps you can't spare the time."

"Indeed I can," he answered, stepping in and taking the seat facing her. "The Strand will be all in my way to Leadenhall Street."

They had not seen much of one another, and yet they were intimate, for each liked the other. Mr. Grubb had paid one short visit to Court Netherleigh with his wife; it was in the first year of his marriage, and they stayed three days. Miss Upton called on them sometimes when she came to town, perhaps once or twice a year; and that was all.

"You were saying something to Adela about giving a present to her sister," began Miss Upton, as they ambled along. "I take it that you were sincere."

"Indeed I was. I should like to give them something that will be useful—regardless of cost," he added, with a smile. "Can you suggest anything?"

"I can. A little open-carriage and pony—if you would like to go as far as that. Mary will want it badly. The old pony-carriage, used by Mrs. Cleveland all her married life to get about the straggling parish in, is the most worn, ramshackle thing now you ever saw; it will hardly hold together. And the poor pony is on its last legs."

"They shall have a new one. Thank you for telling me," added Mr. Grubb, with a sunny smile.

"And I daresay you wonder why I can't give them this thing myself," resumed Miss Upton; "but the truth is—don't laugh—I am refurnishing the house, and I don't like to do too much. It would look ostentatious, patronising, and Cleveland would feel it so in his heart. I had a rare battle with him about the furniture, when I told him what I meant to do; I had already, in fact, given orders for it. 'You cannot bring Lady Mary home to that shabby dining and drawing-room of yours, Thomas Cleveland, with their chipped and worn chairs and tables, and their dirty walls,' I said to him yesterday. 'I fear I can't afford to have them renovated,' he answered me, his face taking a long look. 'Of course you can't,' I said, 'whoever heard of a parson that could; I mean to do it myself.' Well, then we had a fight. Mary had seen the rooms and knew what they were, he maintained. Upon which I cut short the argument by saying the orders were already given, and the workmen ready to go in. I had seen for a month or two past, you must understand, Francis, how matters were turning between him and Mary Chenevix."

Miss Upton broke off with a short laugh. "The idea of my calling you Francis!" she exclaimed. "Will you forgive me?"

"*Forgive* you! Dear Miss Upton, if you only knew how pleasant to me the name sounds from your lips!"

"When I think of you it is generally as *Francis* Grubb, and so it escaped me. Well, then, you will give them this new pony and carriage?"

"I will. And thank you sincerely for suggesting it."

"Does Adela make you a good wife yet?" cried Miss Upton, fixing her keen eyes upon him. And Francis Grubb, at the abrupt query, grew red to the very roots of his waving hair.

"Is she becoming affectionate to you, as a gracious wife should be?" pursued Miss Margery, for he did not answer.

"I do not complain of my wife; please understand that, Miss Upton."

"Quite right of you not to. But I believe I understand rather more than appears on the surface; have understood for some time past. I gave her a lecture when I was last here. I did, indeed; though you may not suppose it."

He smiled. A poor smile at best. Margery Upton leaned forward and put her hand upon his hand, that lay on his knee.

"There is only one thing for it—patience. Bear quietly. Adela used to be a sweet girl; I think she has a good heart, and what evil spirit has taken possession of her I cannot conceive. I *think* things will work round in time, even as you could desire them."

"Ay!"

"And, for the present, I say, keep up a good heart—and *bear*. It is my best advice to you."

He took her hand within both his, and pressed it fervently, making no comment in words. And just then the fly pulled up in the Strand.

"I have not asked about your mother," said Miss Upton, as he stood at the door to say farewell after getting out.

"She is pretty well, thank you, now."

"And your sister? Does she get over that wretched business of Robert Dalrymple's?"

"Of course—in a degree. Time softens most things. But she will never forget him."

He shook hands finally with Miss Upton; he walked on to his house in Leadenhall Street, his step flagging, his heart weary. Entering his own private room, he found two ladies within it. His mother, who was seated in the most easy chair the room afforded; and his sister. Mrs. Lynn was a tall, dignified, upright woman still: her beautiful gray eyes were just like his own, her refined countenance, sickly now, bore yet its marks of unusual intellect.

"Mother!" he exclaimed, in surprise. "How glad I am to see you!"

"I drove up to the Bank upon a little matter of business, and came on to see you after it was transacted," she explained, as he kissed her. "It is unusual to find you out at this time of day, Francis; but the clerks thought you would be in soon, and I waited. I am glad of the rest; the journey has so tired me."

"Why will you not let me do your matters of business for you, mother?" he tenderly asked, as he busied himself to get a glass of wine for her and some biscuits.

"Because as long as I *can* do things for myself, I like to do them," she answered, "and my old-fashioned carriage is an easy one. I do not care to become quite the incapable old woman before the necessity for it sets inevitably in. And now, how is it with yourself, Francis? Your brow wore a troubled look as you entered."

Never did Francis Grubb smile a more genial smile than now. Not even to his mother would he willingly show his care. "It is quite well with me," he laughed; "well and flourishing. Drink your wine, mother dear."

"Your wife?" whispered Mrs. Lynn in a tone of doubt—of pain. "Is she—more friendly?"

Oh, we are friendly enough—quite so,” he lightly answered, angry with himself for not being able to suppress the flush that rose at the question. “Is that a new dress you have on, Mary? It is marvellously pretty.”

“If her child had but lived!” sighed Mrs. Lynn, alluding to Lady Adela.

“Quite new; on new to-day; and I am very glad you admire it,” gaily answered Mary, as she spread out the dress with both hands, and turned herself about on her brother’s dull red carpet for inspection. She was as thankful to drown the other subject as he was: she knew, unhappily, more about it than her mother. “I am going out on a visit, sir, so of course I must have some pretty things.”

“Going where?”

“To Lawn Cottage, at Netherleigh. Mrs. Dalrymple wants me—she is lonely there. I can only spare her a week though; it will not do to leave mamma for longer. Alice is at Lady Sarah Hope’s, you know, and Selina is in town, the gayest of the gay.”

“Rather too gay, I fancy,” remarked Mr. Grubb. “Mother,” he added, turning from his sister, “I have just left your friend of early life—Miss Upton. She enquired after you.”

“Very good of her!” retorted Mrs. Lynn, proudly and stiffly. “I do not care to be spoken to of Margery Upton, as you know, Francis. She—and others—voluntarily severed all connection between us in those early years. It pained me more than you, or anyone else, will ever know; but it is over and done with, and I do not willingly recall it, or them, to my memory.”

Ah! that separation might have brought keen pain to Mrs. Lynn in early days, but not so cruelly keen as the pain something else was bringing to her son in these later ones. As Francis Grubb, his visitors departed, took his place at his desk, and strove to apply his mind to his business, he found it difficult. Twice to-day had his wife’s behaviour to him been remarked upon—by Miss Upton and by his mother. Was it, could it be the fact, that the unhappiness of his home, the miserable relations obtaining between himself and his wife, had become patent to all the world? The draught had already been rising to a pretty good height in his cup of bitterness; this would fill it to the brim.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DAY OF RECKONING.

“WHAT an idiot I have been!” soliloquised Selina Dalrymple. “And what a cat that Damereau is!”

The above pretty speech—not at all suitable for pretty lips—was given vent to by Mrs. Oscar Dalrymple on her return from that morning visit to her milliner, when the latter had wholly refused to listen to reason, and both had lost their courtesy.

Her dainty bonnet tossed on the bed, her little black lace mantle on the back of her low dressing-chair, Selina, who had come straight home, swayed herself backwards and forwards in the said chair, as she mentally ran over the items of the keen words just exchanged between herself and Madame, and wondered what in the world she was to do.

"If I had but kept my temper!" she thought, in self-reproach. "It was always a fault of mine to be quick and fiery—like poor Robert. It was nothing but that which made her so angry. What on earth would become of me if she should do as she says—send the account to Oscar?"

Selina started up at the thought. Calmly equable to a rather remarkable degree in general, she was one of the most restless of human beings when she did give way to excitement. Just as Robert had been.

"If he had but lived!" she cried, tears filling her eyes as her thoughts reverted to her brother, "I could have taken this trouble to him, and he would have settled it. Robert was so generous!"

But Selina quite forgot to recall the fact that her brother's income, at the best, would not have been larger than her husband's was. Not quite as large, indeed, for Oscar had his own small patrimony of six or seven hundred a year in addition. Just now she could not be expected to remember common sense.

"How is this woman to be pacified?" she resumed, her reflections reverting to Madame Damereau. "What a fool I was to provoke her! Two or three hundred pounds might do it for the present. Where am I to get them? If she carries out this dreadful threat and appeals to Oscar, what should I do? What *could* I do? And all the world would know—Oh!" she shivered, "I must stop that. I must get some from him, if I can. I will try at once. Ugh; what a calamity the want of money is!"

She descended the stairs and entered the dining-room, where her husband was. He sat at the table, writing letters, and seemed to be in the midst of business and accounts.

"Oscar!"

He looked up. "What is it?"

"Oscar," she said, advancing and standing close to him, "can you let me have a little money?"

"No, that I can't, Selina. I am settling up a few payments now, and can only do it by halves. Others I am writing to put off entirely for the present."

He had bent over his writing again, as if the question, being answered, was done with.

"Oscar, I must have it."

"What money do you mean? Some for housekeeping? I can let you have that."

"No, no: for myself. I want—I want—two hundred pounds,"

she said, jerking it out. She did not dare to say three, her courage failed her.

He put down the pen and turned towards her in displeasure. "Selina, I told you before we came to town that I could not have these calls made upon me, as I had last year. You know how very small our income is, and you know that your extravagance has already crippled it. The allowance I make you is greater than I can afford. I cannot give you more."

"Oh, Oscar, I must have it," she exclaimed in excitement, terrified at the aspect her situation presented to her, for her mind was apt to be imaginative. "Indeed, I must—even at an inconvenience. But two hundred pounds!"

"To squander away in folly?"

"No. If it were only to squander away, I might do without it; and I cannot do without this."

Mr. Dalrymple looked keenly at her, and she turned from his gaze. "Let me know what you want it for, that I may judge of the necessity you speak of. If it is not convenient to you to tell me, Selina, you must be satisfied with my refusal."

"Well, then," she said, seeing no help for the avowal, "I owe it."

"Owe it! Owe two hundred pounds! *You!*"

So utter was his astonishment, so blank his dismay, that Selina's heart failed her. If her owing two hundred thus impressed him, what would become of her when he learnt the whole truth!

"And I am pressed for it," she faintly added. "*Please* let me have it, Oscar."

"What have you gone in debt for?"

"Various things," she answered, not caring to avow particulars. But he looked steadfastly at her, waiting for the truth. "Dress."

"The compact between us was that you should not run in debt," he said, in a severe tone; "you promised to make your allowance do. You have behaved ill to me, Selina."

She bent her head, feeling that she had. Oh, feeling it terribly, just then.

"Is this all you owe? All?"

"Y—es." But the falsehood, as falsehoods ought to, left a tremor on her lips.

Without speaking another word, he unsealed a paper in which were enclosed some bank notes, and handed several to her, to the amount of two hundred pounds. "Understand me well, Selina, this must never occur again," he said in an impressive tone. "These notes had a different and an urgent destination."

"What a goose I was, not to ask for the other hundred!" was her mental comment, as she escaped from the room. "It is not of the least use offering Damereau two hundred; but she might take three. And where am I to get it?"

Where, indeed? Did the reader ever try when in extremity to

borrow a hundred pounds, or what not?—and does he remember how very hopeless a case it seemed when present before him? Just as it appeared now to Selina Dalrymple.

"I wonder whether Alice could lend it me?" she cried, swaying her foot helplessly as she sat in the low chair. "It's not in the least likely, but I might ask her.—Who's this?"

The Who's this, applied to a footstep on the stairs. It was her husband's. Some tiresome, troublesome old man of their acquaintance had come up from Netherleigh, and Oscar wanted his wife to help entertain him. Remembering the two hundred pounds just procured from Oscar, she did not like to refuse, and went down.

It was evening before she could get to Lady Sarah Hope's. Alice, looking ill, was alone in the drawing-room, having begged to be excused going down to dinner. On a table in the back room lay some of Lady Sarah's jewels; valuable gems. Selina privately wished they were hers. She had to take her departure as she came, for Alice could not help her.

Nothing further could be done that evening, and Selina went to rest betimes—eleven o'clock—disappointing two or three entertainments that were languishing for her presence: but she had no heart that night.

To rest! It was a mockery of the word. She passed the night turning and tossing from side to side; and when morning came, and she arose, it was with trembling limbs and a fevered brain.

Her whole anxiety was to make up this money, three hundred pounds; hoping that it would prove a stop-gap for the milliner, and stave off that dreaded threat of application to Oscar. What was to come, afterwards, and how in the world further stop-gaps would be supplied, she did not now glance at. That evil seemed a hundred miles off, compared with this.

A faint idea had been looming through her mind: possibly led to by what she had seen at Lady Sarah Hope's. At the commencement it had neither shape nor form, but by mid-day it had acquired one, and was entertained. She had heard of such things as pledging jewels: she was sure she had heard that even noble ladies, driven to a pinch, so disposed of them. Mrs. Dalrymple locked her bedroom door, reached out her ornaments, and laid them in a heap on the bed.

She began to estimate their value: she reckoned up what they had cost to buy: as nearly as she could remember and judge, it amounted to full five hundred pounds. She supposed she might be able to borrow four hundred upon them: and she decided to do it. Some of them had belonged to her mother. Then, if that cormorant of a French *marchande de modes* refused to be pacified with a small sum, she should have a larger one to offer her. Yes, and get the things for the wedding breakfast besides.

The relief this determination brought to the superficial mind of Selina Dalrymple, few, never reduced to a similar strait, can picture.

It almost removed her weight of care. The task of pledging them would not be a pleasant one, but she must go through with it. The glittering trinkets were still upon the bed when someone knocked at the room door. She grew scared and terrified; for a troubled conscience sees shadows where no shadows are; and hers whispered that curious eyes, looking on those ornaments, must divine what she meant to do with them. With a hasty hand she threw a dress upon the bed, and then another upon the first, and then a heavy one over all. The glittering jewels were hidden now.

Oscar Dalrymple was thinking profoundly as he sat over his after-dinner wine, not that he ever took much, and the street lamps were lighted, when a figure, looking as little like Mrs. Dalrymple as possible, stole out of the house; stole stealthily, and closed the door stealthily behind her, so that neither master nor servant should hear it. She had ransacked her wardrobe for a plain gown and dark shawl, and her straw bonnet might have served as a model for a Quaker's. She had been out in the afternoon, and marked the place she meant to go to. A renowned establishment in its line, and respectable, even Selina knew that. She hurried along the streets, not unlike a criminal: had she been going to rob the warerooms of their jewels, instead of offering some to add to their hidden stock, she could not have felt more guilty. When she reached the place she could not make up her mind to enter: she took a turn or two in front, she glanced in at its door, at the window crowded with goods. She had never been in a pawnbroker's shop in her life, and her ideas of its customers were vague: comprising gentlewomen in distress, gliding in as she was; tipsy men carrying their watches in their hand; poor objects out of work, in dilapidated shirt-sleeves; and half-starved women with pillows and flat-irons. It looked quiet, inside; so far as she could see, there did not appear to be a soul. With a desperate effort of resolution she went in.

She stood at the counter, the chief part of the shop being hidden from her. A dark man came forward.

"What can we do for you, ma'am?"

"Are you the master?" inquired Selina.

"No."

"I wish to see him."

Another presently appeared: a respectable-looking, well-dressed man, of good manners.

"I am in temporary need of a little money, and wish to borrow some upon my jewels," began Mrs. Dalrymple, in a hoarse whisper; and she was really so agitated as scarcely to know what she said.

"Are they of value?" he inquired.

"Some hundreds of pounds. I have them with me."

He requested her to walk into a private room, and placed a chair. She sat down and laid the jewels on the table. He examined

them in silence, one after another, not speaking until he had gone through the whole.

"What did you wish to borrow on them?"

"As much as I can," replied Mrs. Dalrymple. "I thought about four hundred pounds."

"Four hundred pounds!" echoed the pawnbroker. "Madam, they are not worth, for this purpose, more than a quarter of the money."

She stared at him in astonishment. "They are real."

"Oh yes. Otherwise, they would not be worth so many pence."

"Many of them are new within twelve months," urged Selina. "Altogether, they cost more than five hundred pounds."

"To buy. But they are not worth much to pledge. The fashion of these ornaments changes with every season: and that, for one thing, diminishes their value."

"What could you lend me on them?"

"One hundred pounds."

"Absurd!" returned Mrs. Dalrymple, her cheeks flushing. "Why, that one set of amethysts alone cost more. I could not let them go for that. One hundred would be of no use to me."

"Madam, it is entirely at your option, and I assure you I do not press it," he answered, with courteous respect. "We care little about taking these things in; so many are brought to us now, that our sales are glutted with them."

"You will not be called upon to sell these. I shall redeem them."

The jeweller did not answer. He could have told her that never an article, from a service of gold plate to a pair of boy's boots, was pledged to him yet, but it was quite sure to be redeemed—in intention.

"Are you aware that a great many ladies, even of high degree, now wear false jewellery?" he resumed.

"No, indeed," she returned. "Neither should I believe it."

"Nevertheless, it is so. And the chief reason is the one I have just mentioned: that in the present day the rage for ornaments is so great, and the fashion of them so continually changing, that to be *in* the fashion, a lady must spend a fortune in ornaments alone. I give you my word, madam, that in the fashionable world a great deal of the jewellery now worn is false; though it may pass, there, unsuspected. And this fact deteriorates from the value of real stones, especially for the purpose of pledging."

He began, as he spoke, to put the articles into their cases again, as if the negotiation were at an end.

"Can you lend me two hundred pounds upon them?" asked Mrs. Dalrymple, after a blank pause.

He shook his head. "I can advance you what I have stated, if you please; not a pound more. And I feel sure you will not be able to obtain more on them anywhere, madam, take them where you will."

"But what am I to do?" returned she, betraying some excitement. Very uselessly: but that room was no stranger to it.

The jeweller was firm, and Mrs. Dalrymple gathered up her ornaments, her first feeling of despair lost in anger. She was leaving the room with her parcel when it occurred to her to ask herself, in sober truth, WHAT she was to do—how procure the remainder of the sum necessary to appease Madame Damereau. She turned back, and finally left the shop without her jewels, but with a hundred pounds in her pocket, and her understanding considerably enlightened as to the relative value of a jewel to buy and a jewel to pledge.

Now it happened that, if Mrs. Dalrymple had repented showing her temper to Madame Damereau, that renowned artiste had equally repented showing hers to Mrs. Dalrymple. She feared it might tell against her with her customers, if it came to be known: for she knew how popular Selina was: truth to say, she liked her herself. Madame came to the determination of paying Mrs. Dalrymple a visit, not exactly to apologise, but to soothe away certain words. And to qualify the pressing for some money, which she meant to do (whether she got it or not), she intended to announce that the articles ordered for the wedding festivities would be supplied. "It's only ninety pounds, more or less," thought Madame, "and I suppose I shall get the money some time."

She reached Mrs. Dalrymple's in the evening, soon after that lady had departed on her secret expedition to the pawnbroker. Their London lodgings were confined. The dining-room had Mr. Dalrymple in it, so Madame Damereau was shown to the drawing-room, and the maid went hunting about the house for her mistress.

Whilst she was on her useless search, Mr. Dalrymple entered the drawing-room, expecting to find it tenanted by his wife. Instead of that, some strange lady sat there, who rose at his entrance, made him a swimming curtsy, the like of which he had never seen in a ball-room, and threw off some rapid sentences in an unknown tongue.

His perplexed look stopped her. "Ah," she said, changing her language, "Monsieur, I fear, does not speak the French. I have the honour, I believe, of addressing Mr. Dalreemp. I am covered with contrition at intruding at this evening hour, but I know that Mrs. Dalreemp is much out in the day; I thought I might perhaps get speech of her as she was dressing for some soirée."

"Do you wish to see her? Have you seen her?" asked he.

"I wait now to see her," replied Madame.

"Another of these milliner people, I suppose," thought Oscar to himself, with not at all a polite word in connection with the supposition. "Selina's mad to have the house beset with them; it's like a swarm of flies. If she comes to town next year, may I be shot."

"Ann! tell your mistress she is wanted," he called out, opening the door.

"I can't find my mistress, sir," said the servant, coming down-

stairs. "I thought she must be in her room, but she is not. I am sure she is not gone out, because she said she meant to have a quiet evening at home to-night, and she did not dress."

"She is somewhere about," said Mr. Dalrymple. "Go and look for her."

Madame Damereau had been coming to the rapid conclusion that this was an opportunity she should do injustice to herself to omit using. And as Mr. Dalrymple was about to leave her to herself, she stopped him.

"Sir—pardon me—but now that I have the happiness to see you, I may ask if you will not use your influence with Mrs. Dalreemp to think of my account. She does promise so often, so often, and I get nothing. I have my heavy payments to make, and sometimes I do not know where to find the money: though, if you saw my books, your hairs would bristle, sir, at the sums owing to me."

"You are ——?"

"I am Madame Damereau. If Mrs. Dalreemp would but give me a few hundred pounds off her bill, it would be something."

A few hundred pounds! Oscar Dalrymple wondered what she meant. He looked at her for some moments before he spoke.

"What is the amount of my wife's debt to you, Madame?"

"Ah, it is —— but I cannot tell it you quite exactly: there are recent items. The last note that went in to her was four thousand three hundred and twenty-two pounds."

He had an impassible face, rarely showing emotion. It had probably not been moved to it half a dozen times in the course of his life. But now his lips gradually drew into a straight thin line, and a red spot shone in his cheek.

"WHAT did you say? Do you speak of the account?"

"It was four thousand three hundred and twenty-two pounds," equably answered Madame, who was not familiar with his countenance. "And there have been a few trifles since, and her last order this week will come to ninety pounds. If you wish for it exactly, sir," added Madame, seizing at an idea of hope, "I will have it sent to you when I go home. Mrs. Dalreemp has the details up to very recently."

"Four thousand pounds!" repeated Mr. Dalrymple, sitting down, in a sort of helpless manner. "When could she have contracted it?"

"Last season, sir, chiefly. A little in the winter she had sent down to her, and she has had things this spring: not so many."

He did not say more, save a mutter which Madame could not catch. She understood it to be that he would speak to Mrs. Dalrymple. The maid returned, protesting that her mistress was not in the house and must have changed her mind and gone out: and Madame Damereau, thinking she might have gone out for the evening, and that it was of no use waiting, made her adieu to Mr. Dalrymple, with the remarkable curtsy more than once repeated.

He was sitting there still, in the same position, when his wife appeared. She had entered the house stealthily, as she had left it, had taken off her things, and now came into the room ready for tea, as if she had only been upstairs to wash her hands. Scarcely had she reached the middle of the room, when he rose and laid his hand heavily on her shoulder. His face, as she turned to him in alarm, with its drawn aspect, its mingled pallor and hectic, was so changed that she could hardly recognise it for his.

"Oscar, you terrify me!" she cried out.

"What debts are these that you owe?" he asked, from between his parted lips.

Was the dreaded moment come, then! A low moan escaped her.

"Four thousand and some hundred pounds to Damereau the milliner! How much more to others?"

"Oh, Oscar, if you look and speak like that, you will kill me."

"I ask how much more?" he repeated, passing by her words as the idle wind. "Tell me the truth, or I shall feel tempted to thrust you from my home, and advertise you."

She wished the carpet would open and let her in; she hid her face. Oscar held her, and repeated the question: "How much?"

"Six thousand pounds—in all—about that. Not more, I think."

He released her then with a jerk. Selina began to cry like a school-girl.

"Are you prepared to go out and work for your living, as I must do?" he panted. "I have nothing to keep you on, and shall not have for years. If they throw me into a debtors' prison to-morrow, I cannot help it."

"Oh," shrieked silly Selina, "a prison! I'd go with you."

"I might have expected something of this when I married into your branch of the family," returned Oscar, who, in good truth, was nearly beside himself. "A mania follows it. Your uncle gambled his means away, and then took his own life; your father hampered himself with his brother's debts, and remained poor; your brother followed in his uncle's wake; and now the mania is upon you!"

"Oh, please, Oscar, please!" pleaded Selina, who had no more depth of feeling than a magpie, while Oscar had plenty of it. "I'll never never go in debt again."

"You shall never have the chance," he answered. And, there and then, Oscar Dalrymple, summoning his household, gave orders for their removal to the Grange. Selina cried her eyes out at having to quit the season and its attractions summarily.

Thus, as a wreathing cloud suddenly appears in the sky, and as suddenly fades away, had Mrs. Dalrymple, like a bright vision, appeared to the admiring eyes of the London world, and as suddenly vanished from it.

(To be continued.)

SWEET MAY.

BE glad, my heart, for I see her coming,
 A primrose chain in her waving hair ;
 A hymn of rapture her red lips humming,
 Blue violets clasped to her bosom fair.
 She bears a chalice with honey laden,
 To feast the flowers on her joyous way ;
 Breathe low the name of this beauteous maiden,
 This Heaven-born goddess, Sweet May ! Sweet May !

Her emerald robe through the valley sweeping,
 The young grass tinges with tenderest green ;
 Like flashing meteors the streams are leaping
 In giddy joy 'neath her eye's blue sheen.
 On nodding wildflower the dew is glancing,
 Down shady lanes where the children stray ;
 Like fairy banners young leaves are dancing,
 And seem to murmur " 'Tis May ! 'tis May ! "

The gleaming wealth of her perfumed tresses
 Floods hill and mountain with living gold,
 Each infant bud to her heart she presses,
 And oh, how swiftly its leaves unfold !
 A tender impulse her steps beguiling,
 She softly steals through some ruin gray,
 Whose crumbling walls, in her presence smiling,
 Resound and echo with " May ! Sweet May ! "

And though she revels in country valleys,
 And crowns the hedges with fragrant bloom,
 Her sweet breath blows through unlovely alleys,
 Through homes of sorrow, and want, and gloom.
 She bears glad tidings of summer weather
 To busy city and meadow gay ;
 So Toil and Pleasure shall sing together
 The we'coming praises of May ! Sweet May !

FANNY FORRESTER

THE SHUT-UP HOUSES.

BY ISABELLA FVIE MAYO, AUTHOR OF "THE OCCUPATIONS OF A RETIRED LIFE," "THE MYSTERY OF DR. HARDY'S MARRIAGE," &c.

I.

EVERYBODY in the City knew these shut-up houses. They stood, in all their gaunt dreariness and desolation, on the great main thoroughfares, like loathsome beggars basking in the sunshine beside the market cross or on the palace steps.

There were many of these houses, and they did not all stand together. There were two immense buildings going to decay on Hay Hill, not three minutes' walk from the cathedral; there was another, in a busy little street in the lawyers' quarter; and there were three or four more, all in a row, at that corner of the Great South Road where it is intersected by Wharf Street. The country cousins, arriving at the railway terminus there, saw these as their first glimpse of London, and began to wonder whether the streets were likely to be paved with gold, when the buildings were allowed to moulder into dust and ashes.

Nobody seemed to remember when these houses had been in any different condition. Nobody's memory seemed to recall them as anything but shut-up houses. For years and years they had not seemed to grow more dingy or dilapidated, having long since reached that state when any change for the worse was not likely to be very apparent.

From attic to area not one pane of glass remained in the windows. The boys who had broken them must have grown into elderly men. Yet most of the windows were shuttered and barred, though here and there a heavier stone or a more vigorous throw had snapped a rusty hinge or smashed a rotten board.

If on a Sunday afternoon, or at early morning, or any other time of silence, a passer-by stood motionless opposite one of these openings, he might see a rat run across the floor of the room within, or a stray breeze stir the torn paper or loose straw which the last inhabitants had left behind them. Who were those last inhabitants? and why did they go? The houses on Hay Hill had shops to them, but the names and trades had faded quite from the signboards.

Of course there were stories about the shut-up houses. The worst of it was, there were so many of them—and each so different—that they could not all be true. It is also a melancholy fact that those shut-up houses caused a great deal of dissension among those respectable folk who are known as "the oldest inhabitants." Mr. Towers, the great grocer on Hay Hill, said they were "in Chancery,"

as if that magic phrase was quite enough to explain everything mysterious. But Mr. Brown, the baker, laughed the Chancery idea to scorn. His story was that there had been a murder committed in one of the houses, by the man who was the owner of them all, and that so he had disappeared, and could never come back to claim his property for fear the police should come down upon him.

Sam Wilks, an attorney's clerk, who wanted to be a detective, made a pilgrimage to the Great South Road, and had a gossip in the Wharf Street shops concerning the shut-up houses there. He came back highly delighted with the result of his expedition. There had been a murder done there too, down in the kitchen of the last shut-up house from the corner. There had been mysterious lights seen there more than once—and, better than all (and everybody's flesh began to creep), on a certain Christmas Eve, after dark, a boy who with a string, a dump, and a lucifer-match was fishing about in the area for a fourpenny bit he had seen there while it was daylight, had been suddenly scared by hearing a scraping, shovelling sound within, as if somebody—a ghost, of course—was digging a grave. It did not go on for many minutes, but it was quite certain he had heard something, because he stayed there till other people came, and the first two or three heard something too. Quite a crowd gathered, and were very angry because by this time there was nothing to hear: and would not disperse till the policeman made a feint of taking one man to the station-house. Then of course they followed him and forgot all about everything else.

But after Sam Wilks' delightful horrors concerning the lights and noises in the shut-up mansions in Wharf Street, the dwellers on Hay Hill began to whisper concerning things which hitherto they declared they had "kept to themselves."

First and foremost among these whisperers was Miss Wince, who lived next door to these mysterious buildings, carrying on her calling as dressmaker in a first-floor room, and retiring into private life with her apprentices in the large low attics, which, on such an eminence as Hay Hill, had a really fine sky view, and looked down on a wide landscape of red tile and gray slate. She was a great reader of romances, and bought old ones cheap. She soon put in circulation a stock of present-day rumours which speedily threw poor old Mr. Brown and his ancient legends quite into the shade.

"I know what I know," she would say, oracularly, with a pin in the corner of her mouth, "but what I've always held to is, that them who say what they know when they're sure nobody will believe 'em, is fools! (Gores are all the fashion now, ma'am, and yours is just the figure they'll suit—not like some of my ladies.) When I just mentioned what I'd heard to the doctor the other day, he said it was the wind, or rats, or a little of both! Tell me it's the wind! Tell me it's rats! Has the wind two voices? And do rats swear? I know what I know, but a poor woman earning her bread has no right

to speak. I trust I can keep myself to myself as well as any in St. Mitre's Parish, and better too, for they're a low gossiping set generally. (You shall have your dress on Saturday evening, faithful, ma'am, and don't you fidget if it's ten o'clock before it comes.)"

Now St. Mitre's, of whose parishioners Miss Wince thought so poorly, was a big church, standing on the highest part of Hay Hill. It was a handsome building, not without historical associations, for it was full of the effigies of nameless knights, and these and sundry worn-out brasses attracted a great many antiquarians to it. It also boasted some very fine old stained glass and some rich oak carving. Its incumbent was an earnest, faithful man, and as his parish was not so utterly given up to offices and warehouses as those of many City churches, St. Mitre's still possessed a fair congregation.

Myers, the beadle, made a very decent income out of the combination of his Christmas-boxes, the fees from the antiquarians, and his settled salary. Besides, he and his wife enjoyed the use of two pretty little rooms over the church porch. With the discontent common to human nature, Mrs. Myers looked upon these rooms as a very doubtful advantage.

The American ladies who came to see the chipped knights and the great poet's neglected-looking grave in the churchyard, were often asked to rest awhile in Mrs. Myers's little parlour, and they would tell her how they envied her mullioned windows and queer corner cupboards. But Mrs. Myers always answered, with a sigh, that "it was not a cheery thing to be left alone with the dead." Myers was above "all such nonsense," so that his wife had to "hide her feelings;" which meant that she talked of nothing but her self-restraint from morning till night.

When the new mysteries concerning the shut-up houses began to leak out, Mrs. Myers's sufferings were intensified. She began to take "cold shivers" whenever she walked near a certain illegible memorial stone in the chancel, which rumour had somehow connected with some of the more remote dead-and-gone owners of the desolate property.

At last, one Wednesday evening, when she and her husband had chosen to retire to their own apartment during the week-night evening service, they had an argument on the subject, and Mrs. Myers, finding herself flatly contradicted, and not too politely characterised by her better half, went into violent hysterics. Her shrieks resounding through the church, two weak women in the congregation caught the subtle infection, and began to scream too, the babes brought for baptism set up a terrible roaring, and such a scene of general confusion ensued that the indignant clergyman had no resource but to stop in the middle of the prayers, and dismiss the worshippers.

And through the parish of St. Mitre's, from supper-table to supper-table, flew the report that the beadle's wife had seen the ghost of either the murderer or the murdered of the shut-up houses.

II.

"WHAT is all this about?" asked the parish doctor, Dr. Bird, of the Rev. Mr. Lane, when he met him next day walking with young Mr. Duncan, the lawyer.

"You ought to know better than I can, doctor," said the clergyman.

Dr. Bird laughed knowingly. "Then I should say it was about nothing," he remarked. "This is the recipe for the grandest uproar and mystification—a few weak women, a pound of self-deception, and an ounce of fancy."

"What do you call fancy?" asked the clergyman.

"The working of the mind in uncertain material," answered Dr. Bird, promptly.

"A good definition, I think," said Mr. Lane. "Well, do you know, I think that should have come first, and not last, in your recipe. It matters to us all, and therefore not surely least to those whom you call 'weak women,' whether our fancies be pleasant or unpleasant."

"You are not giving in to the cold shivers and the creeps and the voices, surely?" asked Dr. Bird, with something very like a sneer in his tone.

"No, certainly I am not," returned the clergyman in his quiet, dignified manner. "I think it is you who give in to them by ignoring the unpleasant and unwholesome fancies which breed them. I believe that from 'nothing comes nothing.'"

"Certainly," the doctor assented stoutly. "There can be no effect without a cause—the cause in this case being the woman's fears and weakness."

"But these, too, must have their cause for outbreak," said the clergyman. "The root of any plant is not simply the point at which the stem passes out of our sight into the ground. A deeper cause for all this uproar, Dr. Bird, is those shut-up houses."

"Tut!" cried the doctor, "if they had not one thing to frighten themselves about they would find another. I cannot understand people's minds being affected by such trifles as these houses. How do they hurt them? They are not their business. They lose nothing by them."

"You don't know what effect it might have even on you, if the sun turned black and stayed so," said the clergyman. "You are an educated man; you have read much. You move among people of similar education and mental capacity. You have travelled and have laid in a large stock of remembered scenery, which, so to speak, you can shift at pleasure for your own entertainment. But these other people have few or none of these things—their lives are confined within the narrowest limits. Now for years these miserable shut-up houses have been a centre of unhealthy curiosity and gossip. They have stimulated invention in the direction of ghastly crimes; they have filled empty and hungry imagination with a phantasmagoria

of evil spirits and malignant passions. It seems to me that you, as a scientific man, should be the very last to deny the almost irresistible power of subtle influences."

"Well, well, there may be something in what you say," assented the doctor. "But, after all, it is none of our business, and I don't see what all our wisdom can do in the matter, since these unfortunate houses are neither my patients nor your parishioners."

"If I could find out to whom they belong," said the clergyman, "I would try to bring some influence to bear in that quarter."

"Can't Mr. Duncan give us any information on that point?" asked Dr. Bird, suddenly turning to the young lawyer, who had walked silently beside them, a very attentive listener to their arguments.

Mr. Duncan smiled and shook his head, which might or might not be a polite and perfectly legal way of conveying that he did not mean to say anything.

Mr. Duncan was quite a young man, with bright, kind gray eyes, which always looked as if he was going to tell some good news. He had a fair, pale face, and that peculiar style of plain features which wear a refinement that handsome faces rarely have. Mr. Duncan was a much imposed upon man. Even a lawyer's professional reputation for astuteness and severity could not serve to keep off the crowd of intentional swindlers and natural-born "sponges" who surrounded him. Yet he was a clever lawyer, and won his clients' cases, and then could not bear to charge many of them anything except costs out of pocket. He had a great many clients, yet he often would say, "Somehow, I do not get a paying connection." How could he, when he had not the heart to make it pay?

Mr. Duncan was certainly not making his fortune; but he was paying his way, and as his constant prayer was that "he might die in harness," he looked forward hopefully, had always a merry word on his lips, and thought the world such a bright and pleasant place, that he was accustomed to say he could realize heaven best by thinking of it as something just better than earth. His favourite hymn was Bonar's "Meeting Place," and he had a special mark set against the lines

"Loving on, unchilled, unhindered,
Loving once, and evermore."

Mr. Duncan's house was kept by a maiden aunt. She loved him, she spoiled him, and to his face she called him a fool, well knowing that she would not have loved him half so well had he been other than he was.

The moment Dr. Bird tried to draw him into the conversation he paused, looked at his watch, and remarking that he had an appointment at a certain court within the hour, he shook hands with his two companions and hastened away.

"He knows a good deal about the property hereabouts," said Mr. Lane, "but there doesn't seem much to be drawn from him."

"Perhaps there isn't much to draw," returned the doctor. "Poor fellow!"

"Why 'poor fellow'?" asked the clergyman. "I don't see why he is to be pitied, Doctor?"

"Don't you?" said the doctor. "Well, I hate looking at one's neighbours in a professional way, but sometimes one cannot help it. He is as fine a case of phthisis as ever I saw—every symptom marked. He has one foot in the grave, Mr. Lane, no matter how long he takes before he puts in the other."

"Dear me," answered the clergyman. "I thought he looked delicate, but then he is always in such spirits: why, he is one of the gayest and most hopeful men I know."

"That's one of the symptoms," said the doctor.

At that moment somebody tapped the clergyman on the shoulder. It was Mr. Duncan come back again. Dr. Bird started, and rather uneasily reflected that it was impossible he could have overheard anything. The young lawyer's face was even more bright and eager than usual.

"Have you never heard the slightest rumour, Mr. Lane," he asked, "to whom these empty houses belong? I ask you in the first instance, because as you say you have been interested in this side of the matter, you have probably made some inquiries yourself."

"It is easy for me to tell you all I know," replied Mr. Lane. "I was told that the person who makes herself responsible for these houses when absolutely compelled to do so, is a poor old woman living in Wharf Street—near the other shut-up houses, you understand. I don't know who has seen her, but nobody can fathom whose agent she is, and I should not think it at all unlikely that she does not know herself. I remember hearing, in some casual way, that she was quite a needy person, like an old female servant. I remember somebody trying to make something out of her years and years ago. She was threatened with an action of some sort. But she kept still and held her tongue and the matter blew over. I should think she must be dead by this time. Perhaps some of the rate-collectors may be able to give you more recent information than this," Mr. Lane added.

"Thank you, very much, but I don't think I'll trouble them, you have told me quite enough for the present. Good morning, again." And once more he hastened away.

"I told you he knew nothing," observed Dr. Bird. "I wonder what he has taken into his head. I daresay he thinks those houses have stood still long enough. Lawyers live on the steam of stirring property."

"I am not so sure that he knows nothing," said Mr. Lane, who always cultivated a cautious and take-nothing-for-granted tone when he was with a man of science. "However, we shall see whether anything comes of it."

III.

WHAT could Mr. Duncan have taken into his head? Probably he matured his plans as he walked towards the court, for as soon as he had fulfilled his appointment there, he sauntered straight in the direction of the Great South Road.

It led through some of the busiest city streets, and then across the river. He stopped and looked down at its silvery highway, for he liked to see the red-sailed barges heavy with their loads of yellow hay. But he did not linger long.

Now the Great South Road is not a genteel or fashionable locality. It is a place to buy cheap chairs, ready-made coats and cotton pocket-handkerchiefs. A smell of tar and tallow pervades it. It has an old church behind a few pale trees, and one or two dingy charitable institutions of the minor sort. Mr. Duncan looked up at the great manufacturing premises around him, and then pushed on to Wharf Street, where he came to a dead pause and gazed up at the great ruinous shut-up houses, fac-similes of those he knew so well in his own parish of St. Mitre's, Hay Hill.

There were three of these dismal buildings, and as he looked at them, his eye travelled on to the next house, exactly like them in size and architectural arrangement, and not altogether unlike them, he suddenly noticed, in its desolation and dreariness. Like them it had been built for private residence. They had all been grand houses in their day, for there were dusty, chipped architraves of richly carved wood above the doors, and the link-holders had not yet been wrenched from the railings beside them. The upper windows of the house, which was still apparently inhabited, were all closed, and the shutters looked as if they had not been disturbed for years. But none of the glass panes were broken. The parlour windows were open: that is to say they were screened only by old-fashioned venetian blinds in two divisions, which went up one third of their height and were then met by thin, worn, but perfectly clean, white linen blinds.

Mr. Duncan took note of all these things, and then looked round about him, and straightway turned into a grocer's shop on the opposite side of Wharf Street.

It was a small, prim, old-fashioned shop, with very bright copper scales on the counter. A respectable looking man, with grizzled gray hair, was making some entries in a ledger. Mr. Duncan enquired if he happened to keep a local directory, and the grocer instantly produced one.

He looked up the numbers of the houses opposite. Nos. 1, 2, and 3 were left in blank. No. 4, the half desolate house, was filled in by the name of Mrs. Celestina Turner.

"Oh," said Mr. Duncan, still running his finger down the list of names. "No. 4 is occupied by a Mrs. Turner, is it?"

"Yes, sir," answered the grocer, "and she has always lived there since our time, though you might have asked many people in this street, and they wouldn't have known her name."

"Then she's a very old lady," said Mr. Duncan, only half interrogatively.

"Well, sir, she must be that when one comes to think of it," replied the grocer. "But one does not see much of her. She was certainly oldish when we came here, and we've been here full thirty-five years."

"Is she really very queer, or is she merely a woman with certain ways of her own?" asked Mr. Duncan, confidentially.

"Well, sir, I hardly like to say," answered the grocer, settling down into a leaning position on his counter. "As you say, folks have a right to their own ways. If she's rich, she must be a miser, and if she's poor, then there must be some mystery that keeps her from letting off the rest of that great, big house, which is just lying waste. For it's generally believed hereabout that it is her own house, and also all those other houses alongside of it, and some people do say a deal of property elsewhere. You see all that is queer, sir. Now, my missus makes a great deal out of the clothes the poor old body wears—faded, old-fashioned satins and silks and gauzes. The women all harp on that string. I don't see much in that myself. Why should she buy new clothes, while she's got the old ones to wear out? I tell my wife Mrs. Turner shows her sense there and sets an example to the neighbourhood. But I'll own to you she does look a sight sometimes. I've seen her once or twice in a low-cut gown with short sleeves. And she always has her hair in curls, and when one comes to remember that she must be nigh eighty, that's queer."

"I hope you don't think I'm asking these questions with any view to injure or molest Mrs. Turner in any way," said the young lawyer, straightforwardly. "The plain fact is I am going to consult with her on a matter of business, and knowing nothing of her, I wished, before approaching such a recluse, to be quite sure that she is the person I want to see, and to have some idea of the present state of things. Tell me just one thing more—does Mrs. Turner live alone?"

"No," answered the grocer, "there was an old woman, nigh as old as herself, who lived with her and waited on her till two years ago. She was as queer as herself nearly, and almost as little seen or spoken with, only we saw her going in and out sometimes, whereas Mrs. Turner herself never crossed the threshold. But about two years ago the old woman disappeared: whether she went away or is bed-ridden in the house, I can't say. And then a girl arrived from somewhere and bids fair to grow into another queer old woman if she lives long enough."

"Thank you very much for all your kind information," said Mr. Duncan. "It has helped me in my work. Good afternoon."

"And a pleasanter spoken gentleman I never met," said the grocer to himself, as he peeped between his wares and watched the lawyer across the street.

Mr. Duncan mounted the worn old steps and pulled the bell. It rang with a startling clang, as if it had been asleep for half a century, and now roused itself with a jerk. Then, as he stood awaiting an answer, he looked about him.

The door-steps were faultlessly clean. The railings which skirted them, though rusty and almost devoid of paint, were so free from dust that Mr. Duncan, who was an observant and domesticated man, felt sure that not only a broom, but a duster, had been very carefully used upon them that very morning. The door, too, had been rubbed down, and all the dust removed from its rather elaborate bevelling. These strange people did not love dirt—it was plain that they shrank from it—in spite of their having mysteriously resigned the best rooms of the house to its undivided sway. Even the area was carefully swept up. The kitchen was evidently in present occupation, though its windows, little as they were exposed to public gaze, were completely covered up by chintz curtains, patched in many places, but spotlessly clean, having been washed so often that colour and pattern had nearly disappeared.

The door was not promptly opened, but there was no special delay. Mr. Duncan had scarcely begun to wonder whether it was time to ring again, when the latch moved, and he was confronted by the girl the grocer had spoken of.

She held the door open only enough to show her figure: a thin, brown girl, with narrow shoulders. She had brown hair, brown eyes, brown skin—a shade or two lighter—and a dull brown gown, unbrightened by collar or bow. She neither repudiated Mr. Duncan's presence nor asked his business. She only looked up at him, half timidly, half pathetically.

"This is Mrs. Turner's house, I think," said he, in that wonderful conciliatory manner of his, which always seemed to give him every right, because it claimed none.

"Miss Turner's," answered the girl, with a mild emphasis on the spinster prefix.

"I beg your pardon—Miss Turner's," he said. "Is Miss Turner at home? I should so like to speak with her for a few minutes."

The girl's eyes were troubled. Perhaps she had received instructions how to receive and dispose of different kinds of callers, and could not classify this one with his bright, pale face and kind tones.

"I think—will you please tell me what message you have, sir?" she said, hesitatingly, and opening the door a little wider. Mr. Duncan did not advance his foot one inch. Nay, he withdrew it from the threshold, and stood on the flagstone outside. He did not mean to storm this dismal castle.

"Well, it is scarcely a message that can be delivered," he said,

with that winning smile to which even vice-chancellors had been known to respond. "It is not exactly business, and yet it concerns business. One can't easily frame a friendly message which will bear repeating over and over again, you know."

The pink grew clearer in the girl's cheek. She nearly smiled.

"I would send in my name," said Mr. Duncan, "only I am quite certain Miss Turner would not know it. And yet—stop a moment. I will send it in all the same. There is my card. Please to tell the lady she will not know the name, but that I particularly wish to speak with her—not exactly about business. And please say that she must not allow me to disturb her, if she really does not care to see a stranger, or fears to be annoyed."

The girl hesitated. She looked at him again, as if she was half inclined to take him into her own confidence and explain the difficulties of the commission he trusted to her. But she took his card, and abruptly turned back into the house, leaving him standing on the step, with the door ajar. He drew it gently to, shutting himself outside, and stood so, with his hand on the worn bright handle.

He thought she would never come back. She was away more than five minutes. When she did return, she opened the door wide. She had his card still in her hand, and her face was quite flushed.

"I beg your pardon for keeping you standing out there," she said. "I tried to repeat exactly all you told me. But Miss Turner says there must be some mistake, sir. Miss Turner has not a friend in the world. She says there is nobody to send any message to her."

"Ah," said Mr. Duncan, quickly raising the kind gray eyes which he had cast down while the damsel made her little speech, "ah! but will you kindly go back and ask Miss Turner whether she has not a friend in another world."

The girl disappeared without a word. This time she wasted scarcely a moment before returning.

"Miss Turner says, will you come in, sir," she said. "Walk this way, please."

She led Mr. Duncan through the meagre hall, with its threadbare oil-cloth and worm-eaten boards, to a door which opened into the front parlour. It was all done so quickly that Mr. Duncan could scarcely take note of anything except the ancient, airless sort of atmosphere. It was not exactly close: probably the windows were open. It was only air in which nobody spoke or laughed, or thought new thoughts.

The girl threw open the parlour door, ushered him in without a word, and swiftly retired. The room in which he found himself was large and lofty, and sparsely filled with antiquated furniture. The things which struck his first glance were sundry huge busts standing on great black brackets, the whiteness of their marble showing staring and ghastly against the dark wall paper. He saw, too, a fire dimly burning on the wide hearth. Beside it sat two female figures, one of

which rose, and came rapidly towards him as he entered. She was a short slight woman, and as she walked forwards, her back was turned towards such dim light as came through the muffled windows. From her step and her whole contour Mr. Duncan thought her scarcely middle-aged. But when she paused about a yard from him, and turned a little aside so that her face was more clearly seen, he thrilled from top to toe with the shock of her appearance.

Yet there was nothing horrid about her, as that word is generally used. Neither disease nor accident had inflicted any disfigurement on a face which must once have been singularly beautiful, nor was there any glare of madness or evil passion in the still strangely bright blue eyes. But all that he had recently heard of Miss Celestina Turner, and all the vagaries of his imaginative neighbours at St. Mitre's, had not effectually prepared him for the reality.

This was a woman, evidently older than almost any woman he had ever spoken with before, yet with long curls fastened back with school-girl side-combs, and wearing a rich and elaborate robe, made in the fashion which had suited young maidens sixty years before. But it was the face itself which was so awful. For it, too, was a girl's face, withered and faded—a very mummy of girlhood—the face as of a spirit cursed with imperishable union with an ever-perishing body—not immortal life but immortal death.

It was not often that young Mr. Duncan lost his presence of mind. But for a moment he did so. His ever ready inspiration failed him. They stood gazing at each other.

"Ah, you look at me," she said, in a thin, high, but not unmusical voice. "You should not wonder at anything strange, for you have sent me a strange message. Have you come from a tomb to a tomb? But you are a living man, I know, though you have the look of one who——"

She broke off suddenly, and her momentary flash of excitement subsided into a dull commonplace manner.

"Sit down, young man," she said. "I don't see many visitors, and I forget my manners. Sit down, and say what you have to say."

He had had time to recover his self-possession, and he glanced at the other figure by the fire. If a third party was to be present at the carrying out of his wild dream, he wanted to know from the outset to what the influence of that third party was likely to tend.

But Miss Turner was watching him narrowly, and she detected the glance.

"You need not think about her," she said. "You and I are alone. Hannah can neither see, nor hear, nor speak now: she cannot do anything: she cannot even die."

Certainly Hannah was as motionless as the grim busts on the wall. Mr. Duncan looked round at them a little forlornly.

"Well?" said Miss Turner, interrogatively.

"I have a message for you from hundreds and hundreds of people,"

said the young man, turning towards her. He did not fall into a preaching tone. He spoke as if he had said ~~he~~ he had a message from a cousin.

But she did not respond. A shade of something—could it be disappointment—passed over her face. She did not yield to it: she sat looking straight before her: he could imagine her sitting so for hours. Mr. Duncan scarcely thought she heard what he said, but when she noticed his pause, she said, promptly:—

"I hear."

"These people want to say to you," he resumed, "'Is it kind to them to let these shut-up houses go to ruin in this dreadful way?' They don't know you: they don't know to whom these houses belong. But one or two of them have got an idea that you know all about it, and they want you to deliver this, their message, to the owner."

"I am the owner myself," she said.

"Oh, I am so glad!" exclaimed Mr. Duncan. "For now I know the owner herself has consented to receive the message—and I fancy she will hear me out, and forgive me for taking courage to come and speak to her."

Again she said, mechanically, "I hear."

"Don't you think all we have is given us to keep—and will be required of us again, with an account of the use to which we have put it?" he asked. "You remember how poorly that man fared who kept his talent folded up. Now these houses—such beautiful houses, too!—are not even folded up and kept as they were at the beginning. They get worse every day. I say nothing about the money that is wasted through their condition, though I think some little starving children and some helpless old people whom I saw on my walk here might have sent you a message about *that*. But, my dear madam, would you like to live opposite these houses yourself?"

"It would not matter to me," she said, glancing at her own blinded casements. But the sense of beauty, dying hard within the woman, was vindicated by two huge nettle geraniums which spread their pale leaves to catch all they could of the obscured sunlight.

"Perhaps you are right concerning that, now," he admitted, with an infinite tenderness in his tone. "But, Miss Turner, like all of us, you have not only a present, but a past. Were there never days in your life when you would not have liked those terrible walls to make part of their scenery?"

He unconsciously repeated Mr. Lane's phrase. He paused again, and this time the dry mechanical "I hear" did not urge him on. The awfully set features were quivering a little.

"You cannot imagine what dreadful ideas these houses put into people's heads," he said. "Up in St. Mitre's parish, they have invented two or three murders to account for their condition. Now those are not wholesome fancies, Miss Turner, are they? Oh! and now I think of it, they have given you a ghost for your very next

neighbour," he added, with his irresistible playfulness. "Just think of that! Cannot you fancy how it hurts the poor little children to dream of ghosts scraping graves in cellars, instead of guardian angels keeping watch over them!"

He could not tell how far she listened to him, but she spoke when he paused.

"A ghost next door! How did they invent that, I wonder? Ah, I think I know. I remember one night when a crowd gathered on the pavement in front of the house. We supposed they had heard old Hannah scraping up coals,"—and as she said "old Hannah" a motion of her head indicated the passive figure by the hearth. "There is a way from this house into the cellar of the house next door; and we had always used that cellar for coals."

Mr. Duncan looked at her as she paused.

"And so that was a ghost, was it?" she went on, presently, with a change of voice, and a strange touch of bitter, youthful scornfulness, as much out of place as all the rest of herself and her manner. "Dear me! It seems I can gauge the depth of human folly well, for I said at the time that would make a fine ghost. But I never knew about the reported murders. The people must have known better than that," she added, impatiently.

"They knew nothing, don't you see?" said Mr. Duncan, gently, "and weeds always grow in waste land. You can judge what a terrible effect these houses must have had, when they made decent, respectable people fancy such things without any foundation whatever."

She laughed—a bitter laugh. "I won't say 'without any foundation,' but certainly without any foundation such minds could appreciate. I think there have been murders, sir," she added, drawing a long breath; "two murders; three, I ought to say. Perhaps there will be four. Slow, slow murders. Some of us are not dead yet!"

The figure by the fireside gave a low, dreadful moan. Mr. Duncan started.

"She does not hear anything," said Miss Turner, coolly. "That groan happened to come in by chance."

"But you will tell me that you are not offended by my temerity in approaching you," pleaded Mr. Duncan, meekly.

"Offended!" she exclaimed. "No, certainly not. I only wish you had come sixty years ago," she added presently.

Mr. Duncan felt inclined to say that if he had been his own grandfather he might have done so. Not in levity: but he was a man of light heart and cheery temperament.

"Do you suppose I deliberately planned to leave my houses as they are—or to live as I do?" she asked. "If you do, you know little of the world."

Mr. Duncan said nothing. He felt that the stagnant waters were

stirring beneath, arousing memories and regrets of which he knew nothing, and he was too wise to disturb their influence.

"Murders!" she said, presently, no longer in that wistful tone of mockery. "Murders! Yes;—one, two, three young women slowly, slowly murdered. God only knows by whom or by what! They were all stabbed to the heart, and then left stunned and bleeding on the world's highway, to creep away from being pelted and stoned, as the world always stones and pelts maimed creatures; and there was never a hand or a voice lifted up to call them back—never a healing touch or a healing word given to bind the torn flesh over the wrung nerves! Is this my voice I hear talking?" she asked, fiercely, with a return of the excitement she had manifested on Mr. Duncan's first entrance. "I remember I used to talk like this at first. No; not at first—a little after the first. I feel as if I had been asleep, and had wakened; as if I had gone to sleep very, very hungry, and had woke again to still find no bread. I did not want to wake till I was dead!" she wailed, pitifully. "You had no right to wake me! You little know what you did when you sent in that last message, asking if I hadn't a friend in another world."

Mr. Duncan sat in silence, but she looked in his face and went on.

"I'm so old and so odd that I suppose it is no wonder if my mind is shaky. And so, though of course I knew better, I almost felt as if some miracle was going to happen—as if one of my dead was coming back to life. I thought it might be all a dream—the girl coming in and going out, repeating the words you said; and I thought I would let it go on, and see what the end would be. There are two graves in my life—and I've never seen either of them in the earth. Yes, there's a third grave—poor Agatha's—but that's nothing. She was buried, like me, before she died, and the second sort of grave doesn't matter. Fancy goes a long way, I used to be told when I was a girl, and I knew it must be fancy if either of my dead came back. But it's something to get a moment of pleasant fancy after living, living, for sixty years with fancies of the other sort. But when I saw you, I knew you were not a fancy; and yet ——"

She turned to him suddenly, and a strange, soft, womanly, light came into the hard, dry old eyes.

"God bless you!" she said, gently. "If people would always walk, like you, into earth's dark places, they'd find nothing there but some shunned, blinded fellow-creature, groping to get out. I will tell you my history," she added, gazing at him with a yearning look, as though he reminded her of someone in the dead past. "You will have patience with me, I know—and you will have pity!"

(To be concluded.)

MADAME DE POMPADOUR.

IT was the day in Paris that saw the young King Louis XV. bring home his bride, the Polish Princess Marie. The streets were crowded with the blue blouses and white caps of peasant men and women, the scarlet hoods of city dames, and the heavy, gilded coaches of duchesses and countesses. The air was vibrating with the musical clang of bells that rang out from every steeple, making mellow harmony above the lively din of the town below. The arms of bands of soldiers flashed in the sunlight; the rich brocaded silks of the ladies glittered and twinkled. The strains of full Te Deums swelled out in long billows through the doors of the churches to meet the crash of military march and fanfare. The great city was one mass of brilliant, changeful colour, one echo of joyous sound, one tumultuous, gorgeous holiday.

Through the sea of faces, the storm of noise, wound the bridal procession. The boy bridegroom, with features and form of faultless beauty that might have suited an Apollo, yet without one spark of the godlike fire of soul and heart shining in the deep blue eyes. The bride, old enough to be his elder sister at least, in her robe of stiff silver tissue, not all one sweet blush and flutter as bride should be, but calm as a marble column, from mere stupid stolidity; only showing, now and then, that she heeded the people and the joy by a smile from her wide, good-tempered mouth. The court ladies tossed triumphantly their pretty flowered and feathered heads, even while they held up Her Majesty's train, to see how plain and homely the new Queen looked in all her wedding finery. The ministers of state whispered to each other that there would come little profit or glory to France from this alliance with a titular king's daughter. The youthful nobles made sly jests about the slow and sober way in which the stream of so-called true love between the royal pair was flowing.

Then there was the Archbishop who was to tie the knot, and a dozen ecclesiastical dignitaries besides who were to help him, all in a high state of rosy good humour and urbanity; for the bride elect was a most devout daughter of Holy Church, and chosen by the great Cardinal Fleury himself. A long, many-tinted, gilded train of heralds, pursuivants, and attendants, ended the splendid pageant.

It was, in truth, a brave, goodly show, one calculated to attract a child's eyes and fancy. And at a window in one of the principal streets, at a safe distance above the thronged, moving, living panorama, a little girl of three was enjoying very fully and deliberately the spectacle. There was nothing in the child to draw especial attention towards her. She wore no dress belonging to the inmate of the nursery in a noble's hotel: hers was the costume of a simple bourgeois maiden.

Her face, though very intelligent, had not, at this age, any very remarkable beauty. He would have been a bold prophet indeed, who, glancing up at that window that royal wedding day, should have foretold that this child would, by-and-by, rule, with an absolute sway which would brook no rivalry, the King who was now passing beneath, and all France besides, with one wave of her fan.

This child's name was Jeanne Marie Poisson, but not as Jeanne Poisson is she known in history. The humble citizen name was to be swallowed up in the title of *Marquise de Pompadour*.

Jeanne's father held a rather considerable office under the French Government. His salary was good, and, for some years, all went well with him and his family. Indeed, it would have continued to do so had it not been for M. Poisson's own personal faults. First, he took to gambling, and then, finding that he could not, on his regular yearly income, both satisfy his passion for high play and keep his own household in such ease and affluence as they had been used to, he found it convenient to dip his hand, now and then, into the public purse, one or two of the strings of which his office placed between his fingers. This went on with impunity for a while. M. Poisson was clever enough to keep his own counsel, and to enjoy silently and comfortably the fruits of his well carried out, sly dishonesty. His conscience sometimes pricked him a little, no doubt, but then those pricks were soothed and plastered over by the respect paid to his position by the world in general.

At length, however, a day of retribution came. One of M. Poisson's superiors chanced to take it into his head to look keenly into the way in which things were going on in grades below him; and all Poisson's misdoings were brought suddenly and unsparingly to light. Very likely there were others among his colleagues who had slipped and fallen quite as badly as he had, but governments always think it well to make, at intervals, public examples. It has a good appearance. M. Poisson got timely warning of what was in the wind, and fled from France; but this only saved his life, not his reputation. He was tried, found guilty, and hung in effigy.

Madame Poisson and her two children, a son and a daughter, were left in no enviable situation. Their money resources were very scanty, and society looked on them with no very kindly eye, burdened, as they were, by the husband's and father's deed of shame. Gradually, however, matters grew brighter with them. Madame Poisson was a handsome, quick-witted woman, and managed to glide back again into the favour of her neighbours. A rich old gentleman, by name M. le Normand Tournehem, took a great fancy to her and her children, especially to the girl Jeanne, and became a fast, unwearying friend to the family.

M. le Normand's first care for his favourite Jeanne showed that he must have been a man of enlightened good sense. In those days, girls, even of noble families, seldom if ever received more than the

scantiest sprinkling of education ; but the old gentleman knew that Madlle. Poisson was in a position which would make her mind and hands the chief things she would have to depend on ; so he resolved that she should be trained in a way to make both useful to her in her journey through the world.

Jeanne's intellectual powers soon showed that they were worthy of cultivation. She displayed, early, a considerable artistic talent, and after a little good instruction, followed up by steady application, she handled the engraver's tools with much skill. She also developed, with teaching, a delicate, musical taste ; she became the mistress of several languages, and she was well read in history. Another point in which Madlle. Poisson distinguished herself, and a point greatly valued in the France of that day, was her dancing, which was like sweetest, softest music re-echoed in silent motion. Her whole form seemed to swim on waves of airy grace ; from her little, daintily carried head down to her taper feet she was one with the spirit of the dance. To watch her, thus animated, brought back to tired eyes dreams of summer leaves waving in the breeze.

This singular charm of Jeanne Poisson's dancing arose, no doubt, in great measure from the beauty of her shape and figure. As a very young girl she was too thin and wasp-like in form ; but as soon as she grew up, her flexible grace of movement and carriage became one of the most striking things about her. Her face, also, bloomed into a rare flower of female loveliness ; the features were delicately chiselled, and were lit by a mobility of expression which was wonderful in its changeful radiance, as it flashed from eye to lip, from cheek to brow. Added to this, Jeanne Poisson had a ready tongue in social talk, that sent sparks of wit and fun flying hither and thither wherever she went. No wonder, then, that she had a crowd of worshippers round her shrine. Madlle. Poisson had far more liberty of speech and action in her bourgeois sphere than was allowed, in those times, in France, to young ladies of noble birth ; and this, with her natural aptitude for making the most of all the advantages she possessed, made her, even at this early age, a star that shed its brightness very freely upon all.

It was necessary, however, for her and her mother to make a choice from among the many lovers who surrounded her ; and they were guided in it by their gratitude and affection for their old friend M. le Normand. M. le Normand d'Etiolles, his nephew, was one of Jeanne's warmest, most constant suitors, and he was accepted.

The young man seems, at least at the time of his marriage, to have been most thoroughly in love. As for Jeanne, she certainly did not feel a single spark of real affection for her husband from the very beginning. But then conjugal attachment was as much out of fashion for women, in those days, in France, as white muslin and blue ribbons. What Jeanne was doing in marrying M. le Normand d'Etiolles, without caring for him any more than she did for her hair-

dresser, was just what all other girls of her age were doing around her: and so we can scarcely blame her for the proceeding.

M. le Normand d'Etioles was a rich man, and his money enabled his wife to shine yet more brightly in society than she had yet done. Her wit and beauty were now set off by gleaming jewels, and folds of billowy lace, and glistening silk hangings. Her salon became a favourite resort for men of mind and thought, who always found a responsive note in their hostess's words and sympathetic eyes; and many of the young nobility so far forgot their grandeur as to be never so happy as when they were this bourgeois lady's guests.

Had it not been for certain splendid temptations which came in her way, Jeanne might thus have played a brilliant and innocent part in the story of Parisian society of that period. Perhaps, in this case, we might know her now as an author or an artist; but a very different path from that was before her.

One night: a night which was to decide fair Jeanne's destiny: she went, dressed in character, to a masquerade ball. Louis XV. was there, as he fancied, incognito. He had seen and admired Madame Le Normand d'Etioles at some public place where they had chanced to be together; and, masked though she was, he at once recognised her grace of shape and movement. The King, believing himself completely disguised, followed the lady, and soon contrived to get into conversation with her on a sofa a little apart from the rest of the company. The astute Jeanne, who was as quick sighted as she was beautiful, knew, from the very first moment, who was sitting at her side, but gave not the slightest outward sign of such knowledge. As the gilded ball of playful gallantry was being rolled nimbly up and down between the two, there rose first in Jeanne's mind a waking whisper of what she might become.

A "Maitresse en titre" was as much, at that time, a recognised personage at the French court as the Prime Minister of France himself. She was to the full as highly honoured as that dignitary, and if she played her cards well she might hold quite as much power in her hands. She who had last filled the office was just dead when the King and Madame Le Normand d'Etioles met at the masquerade. Jeanne was by nature aspiring and ambitious, and the question flashed through her brain: "Why should not I take her place?"

With that question the first drop of temptation filtered into Jeanne's soul. She did not, as has before been said, love her husband. Her grasping brain was enticed and drawn on by the prospect of vast power which now opened before her; for already the whole woman felt instinctively that she was fit to reign. That little drop of temptation, then, grew and grew until it swelled into a great wave, which washed her away from all home ties, and landed her, at length, in the royal palace.

Jeanne does not seem to have been carried away, at this time, by any very strong passion for her royal lover: it was hardly likely she

could be when we consider his great mental inferiority to hers. A thirst for power was what chiefly led her on. Still, throughout her whole career, she was very faithful to Louis, and very true in her devotion to his interests and to those of France.

When we cast back our glance up the vista of time, and fix our gaze on the picture of this great woman, and mark the one black shadow which rests upon it, we must not judge her by the light of our own day. We must look at her impartially among the social circumstances which, in the France of that age, surrounded her. Conjugal fidelity was a thing utterly unknown in the land among the higher classes. The lover, "*l'ami intime*" as he was called in polite French parlance, was an indispensable part of every fine lady's household. It is true that both the fair dames and their cavaliers were frequently seen at mass and at all sorts of religious ceremonies, but they went back again to the salon to flirt and make love quite as briskly as ever. The King's "*Maitresse en titre*" was paid full as much respect by every one about the Court as was the Queen, and the Queen never dreamt of presuming to dispute her rival's rights; the whole public opinion in grand circles would have been against her if she had. We must recollect all this when we think of Madame de Pompadour, and be thankful that we have fallen on times when purer manners reign, at least, in outward things. We must admire the real nobility of the woman's nature, which could not fail to shine out even in her equivocal position, and strive in our generation to do as much for our country and our fellow men as she did for hers.

Louis XV. according to the fashion of sovereigns of the day, made short work in the appropriation and exaltation of his favourite. M. Le Normand d'Etiolles was civilly told that he was no more wanted in France, and Jeanne was made Marquise de Pompadour, the name under which we know her.

When we set aside Madame de Pompadour's connection with the King, there can be no doubt about the lofty and brilliant part she played in the history of France of that period. She roused Louis from his natural apathetic sloth of character, and sent him out, as the head of his army, to win glory for France and himself. She held the reins of government very much in her hands, and managed state affairs with a clear-sightedness and skill that would have done honour to a gray-headed minister. She was a liberal patroness of men of art and letters. She founded hospitals and tended, herself, the sick in their wards. Her fertile, inventive faculties produced all kinds of new fashions in dress and furniture, trade flourished under her auspices, and her brain may be said to have kept going three parts of the manufactories in France. Her artistic talent came well to the front at this period, and she would sometimes draw original designs to be painted on china services which she ordered for her own use: designs which always became very popular and general, such was their elegance and taste.

Many are the great men who stand grouped round Madame de Pompadour, all of them owing something to her genial sympathy or kindly discernment. We will try, for a moment, to call up a vision of her salon on one of the evenings of her grand receptions. Lights are gleaming in their silver sconces; bright eyes are sparkling, jewels are flashing, flowered brocade dresses, of every tint that decks a summer garden, are shimmering. It dazzles our gaze as we look around. But most radiant of all shines the beauty of the lady about whom everybody is clustering; the colours of her robes are harmonious as the hues that tinge the western clouds at eventide. That grace of motion, as she glides hither and thither among her guests, the lightning-like play of expression swiftly coming and going in that fair face, all proclaim to us that this is none other than Madame de Pompadour herself, a fitting queen, in truth, for the scene.

But hark! what is that sound that comes ringing up the staircase; that sound which makes everyone look expectantly at the door—yes; even Madame herself, though she is at this instant paying court to an old duke whose breast is one sheet of glittering orders? It seems almost like shrill laughter; and yet, as it draws nearer, we find that it is only a high-keyed, high-pitched voice. And now the speaker is in the room. At first sight there is nothing so very remarkable in his appearance. He is short and thin, and wears a very plain coat. But watch his face as he talks, and we change our opinion. Were ever eyes so full of intellectual fire? But as for the smile, it is so full of finest irony that it makes us shiver as if we were looking at a bright icicle. He is always in restless movement. The many gilded, satin-covered chairs around are of little use to him, for nearly all the evening he is kneeling at the feet of some lady or other of the company. Voltaire is always a faithful adorer, at least in all outward and visible signs, of woman.

Altogether a very different individuality is the form which next crosses our magic canvas. With what an air of supreme scorn he folds his arms upon his breast; what self-absorbed melancholy there is in his glance; the ladies get no homage here, they have to court him for so much as a word or look; Rousseau is, evidently, entirely wrapped up to-night in his own merits, and his latest pet personal grievance.

It does our eyes good to turn away from Jean Jacques, to one who is standing not far off. What a broad, thoughtful brow he has; what a calm, still depth there is in his glance; and what hearty, sunny sweetness there is in his smiles. We feel, as we draw near him, as if, at his side, the most downcast spirit would be lifted up, the weakest would grow strong; we are sure that there must be quiet home brightness in his house, even in the midst of this restless, tinselled, Parisian life. And so there is, for Helvetius chose his fair, young wife without one thought of anything but love. But we can

linger no longer before our enchanted mirror: we must break the spell and hurry away.

Madame de Pompadour never lost her empire over the mind of Louis XV. after she had once gained it. Years went on, and her noontide of beauty was past, but still she seems to have had as much attraction for the King as ever. This lasting influence, no doubt, had its chief source in her varied power of charming. The mind of Louis was a jaded, weary mind, that had worn threadbare life's pleasures, and then fallen half asleep out of sheer apathetic idleness. But whenever he entered Madame de Pompadour's presence he was sure to find some new, sparkling excitement awaiting him. Now it was some fresh jewel of wit that flashed upon her lips; now she came to meet him in some wondrously devised costume. And yet, all the while that she kept him thus her willing slave, she never failed to act a nobler part towards him in stirring him up to recollect his kingship and his duties to France. It is no exaggeration to say that Madame de Pompadour was the mainspring of every public act and word, indicative of the slightest spirit and courage, done or spoken by Louis XV. at this period of his reign.

Madame de Pompadour probably owed part of her intellectual superiority to the education she had received, which differed so much from the narrow, superficial teaching of ladies of rank of that day in France. It was a strange, piquante novelty to King Louis to find a woman who could talk, with sense and lively freedom, on any subject, and who allowed herself to have opinions of her own. This daughter of the Bourgeoisie, who had been brought up to gain her own livelihood, who did not scruple to speak out her mind even in his royal presence, was, as it were, a wondrous, unexpected star which had appeared in the courtly horizon.

It is certain that Madame de Pompadour woke up more of Louis XV.'s heart than did ever any other woman. But still, on the whole, we feel that the effete, sluggish King was very unworthy of the life's service she gave him. She died at the age of forty-one; she died worn out with anxious care for France and for her King. And still her form, as we, in these latter days, look backward, stands out, in bright relief, amid the moral eclipse of all things high and noble of that period in French history: an eclipse which was already foretelling the fearful storm of the Revolution. The French nobility dined, daily, with gold dishes on their tables, while the poor were starving in the streets. She dined with gold dishes too, it is true, but she fed the poor, and was always their friend and champion. For this, then, if for nothing else, is the name of Jeanne de Pompadour to be remembered.

ALICE KING.

THE BARRISTER'S CLERK.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "A FORGOTTEN CRIME."

I.

TIME—one of the earlier days of April in the year 187—. Scene—The Central Criminal Court of the County of Middlesex.

Let us watch two young barristers who are entering in wig and gown, and who take their seats on the benches reserved for counsel.

In bringing it about that these two young men should be friends, Nature had followed her usual mode of procedure; for in nearly every characteristic they were unlike each other—except in indolence. While Francis Julian was a man who had a great deal of fire and passion hidden away under his apparently listless exterior, his brother barrister carried his character visibly written on his face. Charlie Thornton—for that was the name of Julian's pet friend and "fidus Achates"—was altogether superficial. And yet, with it all, he was not a bad fellow, and could you have scraped off a certain outer coating of intellectual cynicism, you would have left nothing on earth to object to in him, and a good deal to like. At the Bar he was two years senior to Julian.

It would not, I think, be revealing professional secrets to confess that neither of our friends was in very large practice. Day after day did Julian come down to his musty old Temple chambers, to find a striking absence of briefs. Morning after morning did he knock at his door, which was opened to him by a very seedy-looking clerk, when something like the following dialogue used to take place:—

"Anybody been here, Peters?"

"No one, sir."

"No solicitor, I suppose?" This was the usual question, quite stereotyped by this time.

"No, sir, none." The usual answer, too.

What wonder, then, that Julian was discouraged? He used to look out of his chamber windows, and wonder how the "fellows opposite," whom he could see working away at their tables, ever managed to get any business. Through a little opening in the Temple buildings, he could just see the sparkle of the river, and the lazy barges creeping seaward on the ebbing tide. Often had he watched them, envying the free out-of-door life of sailors, and longing to hurl his pent-up wasting energies into some current of laborious action. At present, therefore, he is not much interested in the details of the Law, finds Equity dry, Common Law drier, and indeed a "plentiful lack of moisture" in the whole range of legal studies.

Sprung from a family which had its ancestral home in one of our

beautiful southern counties, Julian had yet hardly ever visited the family mansion. Our hero's father had been disinherited because he chose to follow his own bent and select a profession for himself. He had become a doctor. His father—our hero's grandfather—at first expressed his unbounded horror at such an intention, having an old-world sort of notion that to do any work for a livelihood was lowering. He told him plainly that he might become a doctor if he liked, but that he would thereby forfeit all hope of receiving a single penny or a single acre from his paternal inheritance. The son, however, refused to abandon his pet project, and the result was that, when his father died, his younger brother George took the fine old house and grounds.

Dr. Julian had rapidly risen in his profession, and amassed a large fortune, so he did not particularly resent being deprived both of the family seat and of all share in the pecuniary inheritance.

I ought to add that George Julian refused to touch his brother's share of the money which was left; and as Dr. Julian was too proud to accept it, it lay accumulating in the Funds for the good of George's nephew. At this time of our story Dr. Julian had been dead about five years; and Francis had about as often visited at his uncle's house, never very willingly, though his uncle was kindness itself; but Francis was not the sort of person to reject proffers of good-will from any human creature. Perhaps the fact that his uncle's only child was a fair girl just ripening into womanhood had been an additional inducement to him to forget the past.

And now it is time to come back into Court.

The case to be tried was a case of burglary. The prisoner was a rather fine-looking man, prematurely aged, and with an expression of subdued excitement on his features. Now and again he would pass his hand wearily across his brow. At a little distance from the dock a lad, about fourteen years old, apparently, was standing. Between him and the prisoner it was plain some relationship existed, for the latter would every now and then direct his gaze with a look of yearning anxiety into the face of the boy. A pale and nervous-looking face it was, too, and its owner was clothed in garments which were decidedly threadbare.

The lad was looking round on the unwonted spectacle, apparently trying to find in all that strange crowd of human beings some sympathising glance. Although dirt and early acquaintance with want had drawn a veil over his features, yet there was in them something wonderfully open and attractive; something brave, yet tender, that spoke of an unspoilt nature lying in the unexplored depths of that young human soul. Who shall explore them? Who shall find and bring up to light the hidden precious ore in that boyish heart? Who is to be his teacher, the guide of his youth? See him as he looks with a face of entire confidence, of pitying love, on the poor prisoner in the dock, and say what are his chances of growing up a useful man, when his

lot seems joined to that of a criminal, and his best affections are thrown away on an outcast?

But the examination of the first witness is proceeding, while Julian and his friend were briefly noticing the demeanour of the prisoner and the aspect of the Court. The witness is the owner of the house broken into, a worthy tradesman of the better class, and he has deposed to having been roused from his bed at the untimely hour of four in the morning by a noise in the lower regions. He at first had thought it might be the cat. "And when you discovered it was not the cat, what then?" asked the examining counsel, with gentle persuasiveness.

"Well, sir," replied the witness, "my wife said to me, 'John,' says she, 'I don't think it *can* be the cat, because ——'"

"Never mind what your wife *said*," interrupts the barrister; "tell us what you *did* yourself."

"Well, sir," proceeds the unhappy deponent, who is in the painful position of a person not permitted to tell his own story in his own way, "my wife says to me that she thought that it couldn't be the cat; so, after listening for ten minutes or so, I slips on my clothes, opens the door, and goes to the head of the stairs"—and the witness goes on to relate, with the assistance of his counsel, how he first summoned to his aid a man who looked after the shop and who slept in the house, and how by their united efforts they succeeded in capturing the burglar. The evidence, as far as it goes, is conclusive against the prisoner, and there does not seem much hope of his escaping a severe sentence.

"Is the prisoner unrepresented by counsel?" asks the judge on the bench.

"My lord, the prisoner has not the *advantage* of being represented by counsel," replies the barrister for the prosecution, humorously; at which there is a laugh in court, and the usher again feels it necessary to say "Sh! Sh! Sh!"

"The prisoner ought to be defended," says the judge; "who is the youngest counsel present?"

At this question there is a consultation among the representatives of the bar, and the result is quickly seen by our friend Julian rising and saying:

"My lord, I believe that I have the honour to have been called most recently."

"Then," replies the judge, "I must ask you to undertake the defence of the prisoner."

"My lord," replies Julian, "at so short a notice, and without any consultation with the prisoner, I feel ——"

"Every allowance will be made for you," interrupts the judge. "In order to give you more time to prepare the materials for a defence, I will adjourn for lunch now, as it is one o'clock, and you can reserve your cross-examination of this witness till after the adjournment."

Julian bows his acknowledgments, and the learned judge rises

from his seat, and, preceded by the officious official of the court, disappears into his private apartment. There is a general putting on of hats and outbreak of noise in court.

"Well, here's a go!" is, I grieve to have to report, our hero's first exclamation on hearing that on him Fortune has bestowed the privilege of being a defence to the defenceless, and that to him attaches the proud duty of pleading for another's liberty. Then, turning to his "alter ego" seated beside him—"What shall I say, Charlie, old fellow? What would *you* say if you were in my place?"

Then he glanced at the "*mauvais sujet*" in the dock, and involuntarily his heart softened towards the wretched being who was to be his client, and he looked with closer attention at his movements.

At that moment the prisoner was beckoning to the boy we have before referred to, who at once advanced towards him, and, by leave of the warders, put into the hands of the prisoner a large lump of bread and cheese. He would then have gone back to sit on his bench, but this little incident had not passed unnoticed by the young advocate.

He called to the boy, "Come here, my lad; I want to speak to you." And the boy, looking rather frightened, advanced slowly to the awful gentleman in the wig, who had summoned him for some unknown and perhaps dreadful object.

But Julian said very mildly: "So you've given up your lunch to your friend?"

"It's dinner," said the youth, eyeing his interlocutor. "It'll be his only meal to-day, I guess."

"And what will you do yourself? Have you had your dinner before?" continued Julian.

"No," said the boy. He answered as if dinner were a sore subject with him—perhaps owing to the fact that he had not had one for some days. Then, after a minute's pause, he added, "That *was* my dinner, that was."

"Well," said Julian, secretly pleased with the boy's frankness of speech, "you tell me what I want to know about your friend there, and then, when we go away, I'll give you as much dinner as you can eat." He made the boy sit down on the bench beside him, and how he occupied the half hour till the entrance of the judge after lunch, the subsequent events in court will sufficiently disclose.

The door of the private apartment opens wide. Out steps the official briskly and stands on one side; a hush takes place in court, and the judge comes forth once more to his work and to his labour. The bar rise: the judge bows to the bar, the bar bow to the judge: the judge takes his seat, the bar take theirs. The witness who is to be cross-examined, and who has been preparing for the ordeal during the interval by administering to himself a few hasty doses of French brandy and Dutch courage, steps up into the box; up rises Mr. Julian, the jury prick up their ears, and the drama begins.

I will not weary my readers' patience with a verbatim account of the proceedings. The cross-examination of this witness was very much like all other cross-examinations. When Julian took up the defence he devoted his energies to proving that the prisoner had at the time of the burglary taken no trouble to conceal his presence in the house; that he had made little, if any resistance to capture; and that, in fact, his behaviour was just that of a man who had not tasted food for twenty-four hours, and was driven to burglary to prevent starvation.

Then it became Julian's duty to bring forward any evidence that he could in support of the defence.

"I suppose you have no evidence for the prisoner?" said the judge, leaning forward over his desk and addressing the barrister.

"Excuse me, my lord," replied Julian. "Although I regret to say that I have not had time to properly prepare the prisoner's case and call any witnesses who might give a different colour to the transaction, yet I am not entirely without witnesses." Then he turned to the boy whom I have before mentioned, and said, "Edward Graham, step into the box."

"Edward Graham," shouted the usher, "step *hup* into the box!"

The boy, looking pale and rather timid, did as he was bid, was duly sworn, and then, as all witnesses do, fixed his eyes on the face of the examining counsel, instead of turning them, as all witnesses ought to do, towards the judge and jury.

"Now, my lad," began Julian, "what relation are you to the prisoner?"

"I ain't no relation, sir," replied the boy; "but I *calls* him my father."

"Haven't you got a father of your own?" was the next question.

"No, sir, not as I knows of. He," pointing to the prisoner, "he has always been like my father to me; so that's why I calls him it."

"What?" put in the judge, "haven't you any other friends in London? No relations, brothers or sisters?"

"No, sir," said the boy simply, "I've got no friends but him; he found me when I was a little chap. Somebody left me on a doorstep, so I've heard tell, and *he* took me to his house and fed me and took care of me, so I calls him my father."

"Now, can you tell us what your father, as you call him," proceeded Julian, "had been doing on the day when he broke into this house?"

Gradually, in answer to this and other questions, some of the most important facts with regard to the prisoner's life and antecedents were elicited. He had once been, it seemed, a London carter in the service of a great brewing house; bit by bit he had acquired drinking habits, had been turned out of his employment, had gone from bad to worse, had lived a wretched half-starved life in a cellar for the last six months with the boy he called his son. Finally, on the day on which the burglary was committed, he had gone out in a state of desperation,

determined to get some employment, or at all events to get food by fair means or foul.

"I tried to pull him back, sir," said the boy, "when I saw what he was up to; but it was no good, he was mad like; and when he had got into the house I ran away."

"That's true!" broke in the prisoner, in a hoarse, smothered voice. "I *was* mad, and that is the fact; but it's past now."

The warders sternly ordered him to be silent. But evidently this was no easy matter for him; he was labouring under strong emotion, pitiable to see, and he kept pressing his hands tightly together whilst his lips were muttering inarticulate words, and all the time his eyes were fixed on the face of his youthful defender in the witness-box.

"And what made you go on living with him," resumed Julian, "when you knew the bad ways he was getting into?"

Up to this point the boy had answered well enough; but now he pursed up his lips, and was perfectly silent. The question had to be repeated twice; and then the lad suddenly broke out into a cry that seemed to come from the depths of his little heart. "Why, how could I leave him, after all he'd done for me? He found me when I was starving, and he cared for me and fed me, and—and—oh, sir," addressing the judge, "if *he* is sent to prison let *me* go too!" And regardless of judge, jury, bar, and spectators, he burst into passionate tears.

The prisoner made a quick convulsive movement, as if to go to the boy. The warders stopped him. He gave one fierce, baffled glance round, and then bowed his head down, and became quite still. Only by the twitching of his face and the clasping of his hands could you tell that he was at all moved by this unlooked-for incident. But the incident produced its effect on the Court.

"That will do, my little lad," said Julian very kindly. "You can go and sit down now."

Then, without giving himself much time to pause and think, he turned to the jury and briefly addressed them. He dwelt on the sad tale that had been unfolded to them that day, yet of the proof that tale afforded that the prisoner had a nature capable of better things; and he especially insisted that the act, of which he had no doubt been guilty, had been occasioned—as was perfectly evident—by the recklessness of hunger and privation. When deeply stirred Julian forgot himself, which is the key to oratory; and his speech to the jury, though not much more than a quarter of an hour in length, was listened to in silence, and produced an impression on all who heard it.

The prosecuting counsel replied. Then came the summing up, and the last stage of all was reached—the jury retired to consider their verdict.

In half an hour they returned, and the foreman announced—"We find the prisoner guilty of breaking into the house with intent to steal food only; and we strongly recommend him to the mercy of the

Court." So Julian's eloquence and the boy's evidence had produced their effect. The poor prisoner was allotted a year's imprisonment, was hurried out of the dock before he was able to realise his sentence; the crowd began to move out, another case was called on, and the Court resumed its ordinary work as if no tragedy equal in its awful import to the self-wrought doom of *Œdipus* or the predestined fate of *Antigone* had a few moments before been acted within those gloomy walls.

II.

Two months have passed away since the day when we saw our hero going through the unwonted exertion of pleading on behalf of a fellow-countryman in a court of justice. Things have altered since then, and people have altered with them. Climb with me the narrow old stairs leading up to the chambers where we first made the acquaintance of our young barrister. We knock at his door: there is no response from within. As our eyes grow accustomed to the semi-darkness, we direct our gaze again to the "sporting oak" of the barrister's chambers, and see pinned close under the knocker a very small card with a very small name printed on it, "Mr. Francis Julian." In the corner are these words, written in pencil: "Out of town at present, attending gaol deliveries."

So we descend the rickety, dry-rotted stairs again, satisfied that our friend is not to be found in London, and hoping that he is reaping a rich harvest from his present occupation of gaol delivering—a process with which we may, without showing great ignorance, confess ourselves to be unfamiliar.

Now that we have discovered where Mr. Francis Julian is not, this pleasant day of early summer, let us find out where he is. Fly with me, reader, a few short miles, till we reach the beautiful rolling Surrey hills, and are quite free from the clamour of London and "the spreading of the hideous town." We alight at last, and wander along a winding lane, green with its untrimmed hem of grass and flowers, and overshadowed by the leafy arms of meeting trees. We come in sight of an old church, with massy square tower and ivy-covered portal, and the clustering grave-stones all gathered round its walls. A little further, and we catch a glimpse of old gables peeping through trees; we see a meadow edged with tall elms, in which the rooks keep up a perpetual windy cawing; and we arrive at length in front of the mansion itself, and the beautiful lawn upon which its antique windows look out.

There are two chairs on the lawn. One is tenanted by a fair girl of some eighteen to twenty years, who is dangling in her hand a "racquet," with which she has evidently just been playing at lawn-tennis. Her cheeks are flushed with the exercise, and her whole figure is full of graceful health. This is Miss Edith Julian, cousin of the rising legal star of the same name of whom we have heard some-

thing. In the other chair, in an attitude of complete and unmitigated contentment, sits the legal star in question, who has chosen this peculiarly easy method of "attending gaol deliveries."

"Well, you see," he is remarking to his cousin, "it isn't untrue. I really *am* attending gaol deliveries. Doesn't every barrister find his chambers in London every bit as bad as a gaol, and can anyone deny that I am delivered from them at present? Yes, and precious glad I am at the deliverance!"

"What!" replies his cousin; "you don't surely mean to say you prefer lawn-tennis to law courts? And when you are getting on so much better than you were, according to your own account! I wonder you haven't more ambition. I'm sure you're really longing to be back among your musty old books. Now, confess, Frank!"

"By Jove!" was Julian's reply, half rising from his chair, and looking at his companion. "What a fool I have been, wasting my days in town when I might have been down here all the time—with you. Confess, indeed! I shall have to confess——" and then he very illogically, unreasonably, and stupidly broke off and stopped.

"Well!" laughed the mischievous Miss Edith, "I'm waiting to hear your confession. Go on."

"Do you really want to know what it would be?" asked Julian.

"Of course I do," she answered, "if it's nothing very terrible."

"Very well, then; you've brought it on yourself, mind, whatever I may say. I was going to remark that I was so far from longing to be back among my 'musty old books,' as you call them, that I should be quite content to burn every volume, and never see one of them again, if I could be sure of having your face to look at instead." And Julian fell back in his easy chair, feeling like a prisoner in the dock who has just pleaded guilty.

And she, to whom this flattering speech is addressed, does she seem startled at this declaration? By her answer you would think she regarded it quite as a matter of indifference. She merely laughs, and says:

"Oh! I knew that before." Then, for some reason, she abruptly changes the subject.

"But tell me all about these new briefs that you have been getting lately, and the trial you told me about, and the little boy, and everything. I am very interested in it."

Julian goes through the incidents of the scene in the Old Bailey court, which we know already, glancing lightly at his own performances, and making much of the little pathetic incident between the prisoner and the boy he claimed as his son.

But we will tell his story without all the additions, explanations, and interruptions to which it was unavoidably subjected when told by an enthusiastic young barrister to a sympathetic little ignoramus of a cousin.

When the sentence of a year's imprisonment was pronounced, the

boy, who had tried to save his father from punishment, quite broke down. He sobbed so bitterly that Julian had to take him out of court himself. But when he had got him out of court, what on earth was he to do with him? So there the inexperienced young counsel was, left "alone in London" with a homeless and friendless outcast of a boy. At last he remembered he had promised him a dinner; so he straightway kept his word by taking the lad into the nearest eating-house, and insisting on his forgetting his sorrows sufficiently to do justice to the unaccustomed fare.

After that, being still quite ignorant what to do with the boy, Julian took him home to his own lodgings in Piccadilly, and told the people of the house to give him a bed somewhere, and he would settle about him next day.

As often happens, he was saved from the trouble of deciding what was to be done by something turning up which he never had expected. You remember, I daresay, my speaking of an antiquated clerk of his, by name Peters. The very next day after Julian had taken the boy, he went down as usual to his chambers, and was sitting in his customary arm-chair "revolving many memories," and wondering if that chance-got brief of his for the unhappy burglar would be the last he should ever have, when there was a slight tap at the door, and the face of the clerk appeared, looking more cadaverous and even less attractive than usual.

He wanted to "speak a few words" to his master. These few words contained an intimation that he wished to leave his master's service, owing to the lack of work and consequent lack of fees. He drew a brief but suggestive comparison between the chambers of Mr. Francis Julian and the chambers of Mr. Higgins, Q.C., whose clerk he had been before, as seen from the point of view of the person who pockets half-a-crown on every guinea paid to his master; and I need hardly say that he obtained from his present master leave to take himself off that very day, if he chose.

It must be confessed that Julian did not like being deserted, and felt somewhat bitter against the world in general, and the successful Mr. Higgins in particular. "It's a clear case of the rats and the sinking ship," he said to himself. But luckily he was prevented from further melancholy musing by a sudden thought which occurred to him. A few moments' hesitation, and he had determined on an experiment as bold as it was original.

In a word, the next day saw Julian's young protégé installed as the barrister's clerk. The mercenary Mr. Peters had successfully accomplished his "Hegira" from the businessless chambers to which he objected, and his successor certainly had one advantage in his master's eye, in that he could make no private comparisons between his past and his present circumstances which could be anything but favourable to the latter.

Julian was not really as rash in this new arrangement as he might

appear. He had observed the lad's character and behaviour, and had come to the decided opinion that he was both clever and honest, though in need of instruction. "Do you know what a brief is?" he had asked of Master Ned, and on this essential point he had found the densest ignorance prevailing, and had consequently given his new clerk a short lecture on the subject.

Well, the very first morning of the experiment, in came the gay and ubiquitous Mr. Thornton, and proposed a visit to Lord's to see a cricket match.

"You've got quite famous, old boy," he said, "with your defence the other day. You can afford to idle a few hours away."

"Have I?" said Julian; "well, it's a case of '*virtus laudatur et alget*.' The attorneys haven't been here in overpowering numbers since that event."

"Oh! they'll come fast enough," replied his friend, and went off into an enumeration of all the advantages to be got out of the course of action he proposed. Now, Julian should of course have resisted this temptation. Mr. Thornton's clever sophistry should have fallen on heedless ears, as he pleaded that if the attorneys did not come to them, they need not stop in for the attorneys. "You can leave word with your clerk," he added, "that you're engaged in the Lords with an important *bail* case, if you like; that'll be quite true."

So, in the end, Julian set off with his tempter, giving directions to his boy-clerk as to what to do in his absence, and telling him he might go out at half-past one and get some lunch for himself. "I'll be back," said Julian, "about five o'clock."

That evening Julian returned at the appointed time, wishing he had not wasted a day, wondering what he should have done if he had not wasted it, and hoping that his clerk had behaved all right in his absence.

He knocked at his chambers. There was no reply. He knocked again, with the same result. "It's lucky I've got a key," he said. "I wonder what that young villain's about; fast asleep, I suppose."

But when he entered his clerk's apartment he found it untenanted. The same was the case with his own room. The bird had flown. Julian took a hasty look round to see if all his books and other possessions were in their place. Yes, none disturbed; and he felt ashamed of the momentary suspicion that had flashed across his mind.

"No; whatever I believe about him, I don't believe he's capable of *that*," said Julian, aloud. "I only hope he hasn't gone and lost himself in this waste howling wilderness."

And this thought made him sufficiently uncomfortable for the next half-hour, when, to his great relief, he heard the outer door open, and his clerk enter.

"Ned!" shouted Julian from his room. "Come here!"

The boy entered at the call. Julian could hardly believe his eyes; he had in his hand a brief!

"Oh, sir!" burst out the boy, "I don't know if I've done right, but——"

But Julian interrupted him. "Now, just tell me first, will you, where you've been to. Why did you go out?"

"Why, sir," replied the boy, "you told me to get some lunch."

"Lunch! at this time!" said Julian, "why, it's past five o'clock; why didn't you get it sooner?"

"Why, sir"—and here, in a quite unaccountable way, Ned stopped short, and looked remarkably as if he would cry.

"I'm too severe on him," thought Julian; "but I must get him to do what he's told." Then he said, kindly: "Now tell me why you didn't go out earlier; I only want to know; I'm not angry with you at all."

The boy brightened up, and said, still hesitating, as if he did not know what would be the effect of his explanation on his master: "You see, sir, I thought I'd better go without as long as I could; it's what I've done often and often before; and so——"

"And so, because you've starved before, you thought you ought to starve now. No; I don't intend you to starve with me. And now, tell me," continued Julian, looking at the paper the boy held in his hand, "what made you take one of my briefs out with you?"

"This, sir?" said the boy, holding up the brief. "Oh, I was going to ask you if I had done right. It isn't an old one, sir; it's quite new, and I didn't take it away from here. I've just brought it here."

"Let's have a look at it!" said Julian, and he took it from the boy. Yes, here it was, sure enough, a brand-new brief, and a good thick one too; with the words "Mr. Julian" on it, and the other equally important words which denote the remuneration which Mr. Julian is to receive.

"And how did you get this?" asked Julian.

"Why, I was walking back here, sir, and a gentleman stopped me and asked me if I wasn't the boy he had seen in the witness-box at the Old Bailey last Thursday. I knew what he meant, sir, and I said I was. Then he says, 'And do you know the name of the barrister who was speaking—the one that defended the prisoner?' and I said, 'Why, it's Mr. Julian you mean, and I'm living with him.' 'Oh! you're living with him, are you?' says the gentleman. 'Well, come with me.' With that he takes me to some rooms up some stairs, and gives me this, and says—'You give Mr. Julian that. I wanted to send it him, but I didn't know his name, and so if I hadn't seen you I should have given it to somebody else.' So that is why I brought it, sir," the lad wound up, "and I hope I've done right."

"Right!" said Julian. Then, feeling he ought to suppress his emotions of internal ecstasy in presence of his clerk: "Oh, yes, you've done quite right; you couldn't have done much better." The young face looked delighted. Julian glanced again at the brief.

There was a good big fee on it, and the name of one of the best firms of solicitors in the City.

"I almost wonder he trusted the lad with it," soliloquised Julian, "but there is something about him which disarms suspicion, and in that new suit of clothes he would be unrecognisable if he hadn't so striking a face. I never saw one more innately noble."

Julian dismissed his new clerk, and set himself to an hour's work at his new brief, which he found to be another case of defending an unhappy prisoner. Having mastered all the facts in it, he left the arguments till the next day, and sauntered back to his rooms in Piccadilly, the cricket-match entirely forgotten, indulging in the most foolish day-dreams of fame and future success that ever entered into the head of a young barrister of little experience and large imagination.

III.

THIS was what Julian told his cousin, though not exactly in these words, while the shadows were getting longer and longer on the grass, and the lawn-tennis game was quite neglected. Very interested did Edith appear in the recital, too, and this naturally added to Julian's pleasure in telling her about it.

"Well," he said, "to cut a long story short, the next day after this came the solicitor himself who had sent the brief—a big, broad-shouldered, genial Englishman: you should have seen him, Edith. It seems he had heard my philippic in the court, had taken a very unreasonable fancy to my style of talking, and came to express his opinions. I must confess I was glad and grateful for the encouragement. So we sat and talked over the whole case, and arranged how the defence was to be conducted, and he ended by saying, 'The truth is, that trial the other day quite knocked me over. That boy's evidence was splendidly given, and if the jury had been men they would have acquitted the prisoner there and then.' So you see, coz, it was my clerk who really got me this new client, much more than my speech on that occasion. The result is that these people have been sending me constant work to do, and paying me handsomely for it; and in that way I have been introduced to other attorneys, and had briefs from them, as well. I really do think I am now in a fair way to success."

"And this is the manner you try to deserve your success," said Edith, mischievously; "coming down here and wasting your time. I'm ashamed of you, Francis!"

"Oh, this is vacation, or close to the vacation," replied Julian. "And you know what the poet says, 'Something accomplished, something done, has earned a'—little lawn tennis with a charming cousin."

"I don't remember any poetry at all like that," replied his cousin. "And what have you done with this paragon of a boy? I should like to see him."

"Whenever you come to town you shall," said Julian. "You see, I ought to be very grateful to him, for really, as a matter of fact, it is greatly owing to him that I have fallen into this lucky business that I've told you about. He's a boy that attracts everybody. He has such a handsome, lively little face, and such nice manners! I verily believe my good angel has sent him to me, to rescue me from the slough of despond into which I was in great danger of falling for good and all. And the way he's picking up a knowledge of his duties as clerk is wonderful. In fact, he's perfectly invaluable. How I could ever have managed with his musty, rusty old predecessor I can't imagine. I intend to have him educated as much as possible, and he shall make his way in the world."

It was getting late, so they set to work to pick up the balls, and put away the net, and take in their chairs. In all this Julian had, as we need scarcely remark, the lion's share of the work, while his cousin assisted with remarks and valuable advice.

Then, as it was still light, and the beautiful evening tempted them to stay out of doors, they sauntered along through the garden to a green path that led under an old avenue of limes, that breathed forth the fragrance of their leaves on to the cool quiet of the twilight air.

"And so your fortune is made, and we shall never see anything of you until you come down here some day as a judge, sixty years old, and quite bald and ugly," said Edith.

"It won't be my fault, cousin mine," said Julian, "if I don't come down here oftener than I have been in the habit of doing."

"Why, what possible attraction can you find in this slow place?" asked she, putting on an air of wondering simplicity.

But Julian parried the question. Perhaps a person who knew woman's heart better than he did would have been led to guess something from the innocent little remarks his cousin had been making. "I'm sure anybody would be glad," he said, "to stay a few days with so kind and hospitable a man as my uncle."

"Oh, yes," said Edith; "but you needn't take the trouble to praise papa to me."

"What if I should say that I find the chief attraction in his daughter?" asked Julian, bending down and looking at his cousin, till he obliged her to meet his eyes. "Would you be very surprised or very angry at me for saying that?"

Edith looked away, and laughed a merry little laugh, and shook her head. "Oh, no, you may say anything you like. Only I shan't believe it."

This was too provoking. Julian caught hold of one of those small hands, took it in his own, and said seriously: "You might stop chaffing for a little, Edith, I think. I hope you don't imagine that all lawyers are always false and deceitful, and that—that—that they ——"

"Well, what?"

"That they always live and die old bachelors. I wish you would tell me seriously, Edith, not now, but after thinking it over a little indoors, quietly—whether you would ever, when you're a little older than you are now—whether you would ever feel it possible to care a little bit about one who will probably never put on his wig often enough to get bald, and who will certainly never be a judge. If you could and would," went on Julian ardently, "you don't know how unspeakably happy you would make me, and how easy you would make all the labours that I may have to go through in after years."

This was quite a long and serious effort for Francis Julian. And how did his cousin answer him? She did not give him any direct reply just then, but said she had never expected him to say that, and did he really mean it? We need not repeat his protestations in answer to this sceptical remark. He and Edith walked back to the house, and she hardly spoke once, but remained very quiet, till she got to the door. Then she hastily ran up stairs and shut herself into her own room.

That evening Julian heard his fate. Need we say that the young barrister, who had but recently gained a new clerk, and a new patron, and a new interest in his profession, learned, before he retired to rest, that he had also gained a more precious possession than all or any of these—a heart that sympathised with his own, and a love that was tender and true.



A DEVONSHIRE COMBE.

IT is refreshing in these days of express trains and electric telegraphs, to find oneself in a quiet village, where the whistle of the engine, the rush and rattle of the train, have never sounded; where a railway porter is unseen; where even the deep cutting and tall white posts, the tunnels, the smoke and the signals, are known only by hearsay to most of the inhabitants. A village which has no weekly paper, no shops, save a few cottages which display in their little windows a pleasing assortment of apples, matches, cotton, and tallow candles. A village where there are no morning calls to be paid, where there is, in fact, nobody to pay them. Where you may wander at will through the valleys or along the coast, without the slightest fear of scandalising any of your acquaintance by the shape of your hat, the thickness of your boots, or the well-worn aspect of your general costume.

O charming village! land of liberty! Who would not be happy in your green retreats?

To such a place my fortunate star guided me. Three valleys meeting near the sea: houses nestling amongst the trees in each of them: an old church: an unpretending school-house: that is all.

A quarter of a mile from the thickest batch of houses is the beach. The sea, open, blue, majestic, rolls its clear, crisp waves upon the pebbles at the foot of the cliffs. These rise high, some red, some white, with veins of gypsum running through them. On their sides are plots of ground cultivated with hard labour by some of the farming people and fishermen. Long trains of donkeys wind up the narrow cliff paths, laden with brown seaweed for manure. This can be collected only at particular tides, and the business of collecting it, "tidal work," as it is called, forms at some seasons an important part of the occupation of the men and boys of Combe St. Winifred.

To the lover of pebbles the beach is an enchanted region. Here he may wander for hours, loading himself with great pieces of green jasper and chalcedony; often with beautiful wood-and-moss-agates, and even rarer treasures. If he have luck he may light upon some desirable fossil, easily detached from its soft limestone bed. Anemones, too, and pink filmy seaweeds abound.

No enterprising naturalists with zoophyte knives and orthodox tin pails invade the quietude of Combe beach. Only now and then you see a little fishing-boat put off from the shore, or a knot of "Preventive men," telescopes in hand, appear in front of their little salmon-coloured houses. You may, perhaps, hear the voices of children gathering water-cresses in the brook which rests here after its quick

run through the valley; or of the men and boys—"cleave-farmers," as they are called—at work upon the cliffs; but there are no other signs of life.

Yet the solitude is not oppressive. The dash of the waves at your feet, and the roll of the pebbles which they carry back as they recede, brace and invigorate the nervous system; a flavour of brine mingles with your thoughts, and the mind receives an increased tone of healthy vigour.

You sit down on the old accustomed bit of beach, which you learn to love more and more every day. No one is very near you, and you have the shore almost to yourself. Spread out before you is the sea, calm and placid. The little waves creep up and curl over with a busy whisper at your feet. The sun has not long set, and pink and golden clouds are reflected in the water. By-and-by the bright colours fade; the sky fills with a tender bluish haze; then a star appears, "in pale glory;" then another, and another; the breeze against your cheek grows chilly. You look round; lights are shining in the distant houses, and when you turn again to the sea it is dull, almost leaden. The rising moon casts a bright track of light across the water.

In such moments as these one feels what a tumultuous hurry this life of ours is; what a strife of wills; what a struggle for worldly advancement; what a whirl of feverish longings and strivings after some never-to-be-achieved happiness; what a constant warfare between good and evil in our hearts. And then the sight of that calm unruffled ocean quiets one; we are soothed in listening to its solemn chant: for the "grand diapason" has more power over the spirit than the finest music that was ever composed. It goes to the very heart and root of our being. It is the work of the Creator speaking directly to the soul of man, placing us almost into immediate communion with the eternal and the invisible.

You take your way back to the village through a winding lane, lighted by the glowworms. The country folks would scarcely envy you your walk, for in this remote neighbourhood they are sadly superstitious, and believe and relate many a wonderful tale of ghosts and pixies.

A curious story of supernatural agency is related by one of the oldest parishioners, who heard it from his mother, to whom it was told by his grandmother, who knew the hero: thus establishing its claim to an antiquity of at least two hundred years.

A Combe labourer was one day ploughing alone in a field, when he heard a doleful voice behind him complaining: "I've broken my peel! I've broken my peel!" an instrument not unlike a shovel, used for putting cakes into the oven. The man looked about in all directions, but could see no one, though the voice continued to lament. At last, being a good-natured fellow, he answered, "Give it to me, and I'll mend it." Whereupon the "peel," with a hammer and nails, was laid by invisible hands in the furrow before him, and

taken away as soon as he had repaired it. On the following day he found in the same furrow a freshly-baked cake—the pixie's acknowledgment of his kindness.

Half-way up one of the valleys, about a mile from the village, stands a handsome stone house, which, with its two wings and the farm buildings at the back, forms a complete quadrangle. Though now only a farm, it was in former days a goodly mansion, the residence of an old family whose arms are still displayed on a stone shield over the doorway, and whose many monuments form a conspicuous feature in the parish church.

The house is rather solitary, standing on the slope of a hill, of which the upper part is thickly wooded, and is the resort of white owls, whose dismal hooting forms a fitting accompaniment to the moaning wind which sighs round the angles of the farm buildings on tempestuous nights. Here a headless lady is said to have appeared, many years ago, dressed in the fashion of a bygone age, and walking with echoing steps through a long dark passage, while she paused occasionally to rap at the doors which open out of it with the long-handled broom she carried in her hand. This continued night after night, until someone was found brave enough to follow the apparition, which rewarded his courage by discovering to him some hidden treasure, and then vanished. Some years afterwards the same ghost reappeared, revealed more treasure, and has never since been heard of. Who she was, and when and how she lost her head, remains a mystery; but the story obtains full belief in the neighbourhood.

I have spoken of the "cleave farming" as an important part of the occupation of the men and boys in this district. The combe women, also, have their distinctive employment. Much of the beautiful fabric called Honiton lace is made in this and the neighbouring parishes. As you walk through the villages the rattle of the bobbins sounds pleasantly through many an open doorway, and looking in you see one or more women with their round pillows on their knees, busily engaged in lace-making. The lace for royal wedding dresses is generally made in this district. When the pattern is designed it is divided as much as possible, and the various sprigs are apportioned to different workers. Thus, in a piece of lace consisting of groups of flowers, one woman will make only rosebuds, another only small leaves, and a third, perhaps, full-blown roses, but neither will have any idea of the pattern to be formed with these pieces. This precaution is necessary in all new patterns to prevent the design being copied. When the sprigs are finished, they are fastened together by the best workers, under the immediate superintendence of the lace merchant, and then the fabric is complete.

Most of the young girls of Combe are sent very early to the "lace-schools," where they seem to work cheerfully enough. They have two holidays a year, generally on the same day of the month: the days on which they begin and on which they leave off working by

candlelight. The autumn holiday is known as "nutting-day," while that in the spring is supposed to be devoted to "washing the candle-sticks."

Climbing a steep hill from the village, you find yourself in a wild region called "The Pits," overlooking a deep valley, and commanding a distant view of the sea. Here, as the name implies, there were originally limestone pits, which, though now no longer worked, impart to the ground a picturesque and broken appearance, which is a peculiar characteristic of the St. Winifred hills. Up and down you go, over tall hillocks covered with short, stunted grass, and adorned with great tufts of marjoram, round which the brilliant butterflies are hovering—for Combe is a great place for insects.

Sometimes your way is shaded by a graceful ash-tree, its trunk clasped round with ivy, and its clear-cut foliage casting flickering lights and shadows across your path. Sometimes you turn aside to pull the tempting pink-brown clusters from a thicket of nut-bushes festooned with waving clematis; or you suddenly find yourself on the brink of some old deserted lime-kiln, the entrance half filled up with stones and wild flowers, and honeysuckles and brambles climbing down the sides.

The woods, too, are beautiful. Whether we wander through them in early spring, filling our hands with the daffodils and sweet white violets which grow there so abundantly, and watching the merry little rabbits at their gambols; or later, when the boughs are laced together by the "luscious woodbine and sweet eglantine;" or when the hop has flung its graceful tendrils across the hedgerows, and the trees have donned their many-coloured garments, and the dying leaves fall solemnly, not sadly, down, "each to its rest beneath its parent tree."

Beautiful and unsophisticated as Combe St. Winifred now is, how long may we hope it will remain so? Already the indefatigable tourist scents it out; a stranger with a knapsack on his back and a stout stick in his hand, is no longer gazed at as an unknown monster. Artists have come there to sketch the quaint old doorways and picturesque orchards with which it abounds. A few more summers may make great changes in our village; improving it perhaps in many ways, but necessarily taking from it the simplicity which is now so charming; and sweeping away its faith in wonderful white-witches, and charms, and pixies, with the relentless besom of nineteenth century common-sense.

Whatever St. Winifred may become in future years, its later charms can hardly equal those of the tender, quaint originality which makes it now a picturesque and perfect pattern of a Devonshire Combe.

S. M. G.

“WANTED, A COOK.”

CHAPTER I.

RUNNING AWAY FROM HER.

I MAY as well say at once that my mother—the best and most indulgent of women—had sent me, Reginald Hunter, to travel on the Continent before I settled down in life. I was an only son, had just left college, and was *thinking* about the Bar as a suitable profession; but a most discriminating uncle having left me a good fortune, I was not very anxious about future briefs. Still, I was not to enjoy the good man's money till I was twenty-five years old, as he had erroneously considered that age more suitable for his heir than the generally recognised and legal twenty-one.

My knowledge of French not being great, I usually found it safer to speak English at the various hotels. Thus it happened that at Cologne, on a certain July day, I marched boldly into the Hôtel d'Albion and requested in English to be shown a good room looking out on the river. The landlord bowed low and said:

“Exactly so, sire.” Yet I fancied there was an anxious look on his face as I followed him up the stairs. We passed the first floor, then the second: but here I made a stand.

“I am not going up higher,” I said, with true British doggedness.

“Veery sorry, sire, but these floor is engaged. The first floor engaged, the second floor engaged, and the third floor is full all but this room.” Thereupon he threw open the door of what in reality was a small dressing-room.

“Beautiful view, sire, spacious, and not in the sun.”

“Very well,” I said, resignedly; “as it is only for one night, I must put up with it.”—What on earth did the fellow mean by having all his rooms occupied?

“What name, sire?” he next said, and I gave him my card and left him to fill up the customary form. After reading “Hunter” out in various pronunciations, he remarked blandly: “There is a letter for you, sire; I will send it up,” and presently I was refreshed with the sight of honest English handwriting. It was a letter from my mother.

I drew a dusty red-velvet arm-chair to the window, and with the soft summer breeze blowing in from the Rhine read the home news. I will not record all that was in it, because fond mothers do write a good many things which cannot be repeated; but this paragraph amused me not a little:

“I have been in great trouble, dear Reggie, with the servants. Yesterday cook gave warning because Sir Henry Seymour's footman has jilted her, and she says it will break her heart to see daily the

house where he 'inhabits.' Then Jane, you know, the pretty house-maid, said if cook went she must go. I think this was her only reason; but the parlour-maid declares she can't possibly stay as I am always 'changing.' It is the first time this has ever happened, but really I am so worried that do see, my dear boy, if you can't make enquiries about a foreign cook for me, French or German. At all events, they could not immediately fall in love if they did not know a word of English."

Fancy asking *me* to look out for a cook! The dear mother must have taken leave of her senses.

I looked at my watch; it was six o'clock, and table d'hôte was in half an hour. So I determined to put off going out till after dinner, and prepared to make myself as clean as foreign ways permitted.

At this moment I heard a clatter of many footsteps on the stairs; next, the music of endless voices, high pitched and sonorous sounds mingled together. At first, I fancied the house must be on fire, or, perhaps, the cathedral; but suddenly the truth flashed upon me. There could be no doubt about it. I was in for a "Cook's Personally Conducted Tour." Abominable! Why should they travel where I was travelling? They would eat everything up, and, worst of all, they would be at the table d'hôte.

I went down to the dining-room with no pleasant feeling, and awaited their arrival with undisguised annoyance. On they came, clattering down the stairs—men, women, young ladies, young gentlemen; all in the highest of spirits, and, as I had foreseen, ready to eat up everything. A waiter assigned me a seat, and I found myself between the last of the "Cooks" and a very deaf old lady travelling with a companion. I had intended to devote myself to the old lady, but was forced to give up the attempt, and seek for some amusement on my other side. The tongues were soon unloosed, and would have drowned the noise of a battle, I believe. At the head of the table sat the conductor; a clever-looking man, who kept the two "young ladies" at his side in fits of laughter. But the chief of the conversation was kept up by a little red-haired man, whose every word elicited roars of merriment. The young ladies nudged each other and giggled, exclaiming, "Oh, doctor!" and the matrons panted out, "Really, doctor, you're too bad; you have such a curious way of saying things!"

"It's an awful shame," I said to myself, "for these sort of people to travel in such numbers. One can have no chance of conversing with interesting foreigners." But at this point I was startled by my neighbour, a stout, high-coloured Britisher, turning towards me with the remark:

"I hope you're thinking of joining our party, sir?"

"No, thank you; I'm going another way." (At least, I fervently hoped so.)

"Perhaps you don't like a good party. That's like my Janet here; she's so quiet there's no getting her to say anything."

"Janet" was, I presumed, seated beyond the portly man, for I could not catch a glimpse of her. Not that I was at all anxious to do so.

At last the dinner was over. I rose, hoping I should enjoy my next meal better, but in my hurry to get away I trod on a lady's dress. She was in front of me, and whilst my foot was on her skirt she tried to move on. In a moment I heard the noise of a rent. Now, few accidents are more terrible for a man than when he tears some part of a lady's attire, for it generally brings him into dreadful disgrace with the fair one, and he is very fortunate if he escapes with only a frown. I began to stammer an apology as the lady turned round, and at that moment my stout neighbour came up, and said, in a loud voice:

"Well, I declare, Janet! It looks, my dear, as if that dress was done for." Of course he laughed at this last joke, and I looked up into Janet's face, dreading what I should see. My words of apology died on my lips from sheer surprise, for there stood before me a tall, graceful girl, with a face so soft and beautiful that I at once thought of some Madonna I had lately seen at Antwerp. She was fair, with bright, though *not* golden hair, grave blue eyes, and a gentle, delicate mouth. So this, then, was "Janet," and one of the "Cooks." It seemed impossible; but as this was the case, I at last stammered the apology which had been delayed.

"It does not matter, thank you," she said, in a refined educated voice; "it is only the gathers." Then I hastened away feeling that nature had committed some extraordinary mistake in having made Janet one of Cook's personally conducted tourists!

After dinner I sauntered about the town, visited the cathedral, had a peep at the saintly bones, and caught myself wondering whether the "party" had done it all, and what "Janet" had thought of it. But of course she must be like the rest of them, and most likely stared at the sights without taking them in.

Over my evening cigar I wrote a letter to my mother and expressed my strong disapproval of her cook's conduct, but added my utter inability to pick up another in these regions. It was most aggravating that just as I wrote these words Cook's party would come into my head, and after the party "Janet." What on earth did it matter to me what this girl's history might be? So I rang my bell and said I must be called in time to go on by the boat.

The next morning I went early on board, chose a good seat and made myself thoroughly comfortable; when what was my indignation and surprise to see a rush, a struggle, and then to hear the sonorous tones of the conductor, saying:

"There is plenty of time, ladies and gentlemen; no need to hurry."

I had fondly hoped that I had left these people behind; but no; they, too, were going up the Rhine, and they too were trying to secure the best seats. I got up, half intending to go back to the hotel and wait for the next day, but at that minute I saw my stout neighbour

looking about for a camp stool. Next I saw Janet look up and down the boat in a shy, bewildered manner to find a seat if possible; I saw her approach my end; and then—was I mad?—I rose quickly and actually offered my seat to one of the enemy. Janet looked up at me, and her simplicity—perhaps, too, those blue eyes—melted my anger.

"Please do not let me deprive you of your seat," she said; "I can find another; or if not, I can go down stairs."

"Indeed you must not. You will miss half the view, and we are going to have a perfect day."

"That's what I've been telling Janet," said the stout man. "Half the battle on these occasions is to get a good seat and stick to it. Sit down, my dear; I always say young gentlemen ought to be polite to the ladies."

Janet blushed scarlet, and not wishing to increase her awkwardness I moved away and sauntered up and down the deck, gazing more at my enemies than at the view. Indeed, the noise they made prevented much sublime meditation. At every turn I took I also caught sight of Janet's graceful figure. She sat alone and silent, for her companion had soon joined the merrier party. At last my inclination got the better of my prudence. I went up to her, pretending I wished to see some special spot through my glasses.

"I hope you find your seat comfortable?" I said.

"Yes, thank you. Please let me return it to you."

I refused, of course, and then took the opportunity of observing her more closely. She was strangely beautiful, but not of a common order of beauty. I was certain that the other "Cooks" thought a great deal more of a stout, high-coloured, large-eyed girl, who was one of their party and appeared to be very talkative. But this shy Janet was evidently far too much above them to be popular. What could be the circumstances that had made her what she was?

"I suppose your father often takes you abroad," I said.

"Mr. Smith has been here before, but I have not," was the reply.

Janet Smith! I was struck dumb. "Smith" seemed such an inappropriate name for this beautiful girl. After a time I started another subject.

"I am so sorry I tore your dress yesterday; you must think men very stupid."

"It did not matter," she returned. "I mended it early this morning, before I went to the cathedral."

"Did you go with all the Coo—all your party," I added hastily. Janet blushed again, and I could have knocked out my brains at my stupidity. And yet after all Janet *was* a "Cook."

"No, I went alone; there are some things one likes to see by oneself; a cathedral for instance, or a beautiful view."

"Certainly, unless accompanied by a very suitable companion."

Janet was not to be drawn on by light conversation. She did not answer this remark, but looked straight before her. Of whom was she thinking? I tried again.

"See, that is the famous Lorelei; in a book I was reading the other day, it gave one all the curious legends of these shores." Janet smiled, and by degrees I found out she knew a good deal more about the "curious legends" than I did, so we talked on on this safe subject till Mr. Smith reappeared, sending his voice before him.

"Well, Janet, my dear, I see you have some good company."

Janet's face lost all its animation; she was in a minute the quiet beautiful girl I had seen the evening before.

I drew away, almost annoyed at having so much enjoyed our talk, annoyed at the unusual interest I felt in this stranger. I, who had frequented the best society, and had seen dozens of pretty girls who had not made half the impression on me that Janet Smith was now making. I determined to have nothing more to do with her; so I carefully avoided her, and seating myself at some distance, said I should now thoroughly enjoy the view.

At Bingen I heard a rush, and before I was aware of the cause I saw that the conductor had marshalled out his party with the speed and precision a general might have envied. I had only just time to catch a glimpse of a graceful figure and bright hair, before we had left "Cook's" party behind on terra firma, and were proceeding on to Mayence in blessed silence, yet on my part with a slight feeling of disappointment.

When I reached Mayence it was late. The red glow left by the sun was intensely beautiful, for against the crimson and orange background the black hulks and masts of the Rhine boats were drawn out sharp and clear. But what are beauties that one cannot share with another human being? I hurried on to an hotel and asked for a bed.

"For a single gentleman, sir?" asked the master, looking at my small portmanteau.

"Of course. And have you any dinner for me?"

"It is going on now," was the reply, "if you will be good enough to follow the waiter."

This I was only too happy to do, feeling thankful that mine host spoke capital English, and that I could make him understand my wishes. The waiter threw open the door. I caught sight of a long table, lit with grand chandeliers, of a multitude of faces; I heard a great clatter of knives and forks and human tongues; I saw an empty seat and was hurried into it; and then turning round found that my neighbour was—Mr. Smith! I was in for the "Cooks" again!

"Good gracious!" I exclaimed. "You here again!"

"Why, yes; we did a little land travelling. Our conductor knows that enough is as good as a feast, and we had a good spell of that boat. There is a good deal of sameness on a river. It was uncommonly nice to stretch our legs, wasn't it, Janet?"

I bent forward and bowed to Janet. How refreshing it was to see her face in that unsympathetic crowd, but I noticed that her manner towards me was changed. Did she resent my having shown my dislike

of her surroundings? Surely there was some strange fate in this. Why, quite by chance, had I hit upon this same hotel? And above all, why was I so glad to see *her* again—glad and angry too—angry because I was glad? The "party" appeared to me more noisy, more uninteresting than before, and she more beautiful, more queenly, more refined by contrast.

Instead of retiring to my own room I followed the "Cooks" into the salon. The balcony which ran along outside the house was soon crowded with them, and this made me suggest to Mr. Smith a moon-light walk.

"A capital idea, sir! I have no doubt the whole party would like it immensely."

"Plague take the party!" I muttered, but alas! too audibly, for I found Janet at my elbow and with a look on her face I had not seen there before. She hastened to turn towards Mr. Smith and said in a cold voice:

"I am tired now, and shall go to bed," and she moved away from me. At that minute I would have gone out en troupe with the "Cooks," if Janet would have looked pleased. I managed to intercept her, however, before she reached the salon door.

"Are you going on to-morrow, Miss Smith? I mean there cannot be much to see at Mayence." Janet turned towards me with a little look of surprise on her face. Then, with evident effort, she said in a chilling tone:

"I do not know what our party are going to do to-morrow. Good night." And, with a motion which a queen might have made when displeased by some petty subject, Janet swept past me, leaving me piqued and indignant with her, and angry with myself.

One thing I determined that night: I would stay here at Mayence till the "Cooks" were well out of the way. Those sort of people always raced over the Continent. Afterwards I could easily enquire what route they took, and then I could avoid it. So I might regain the quiet and contented frame of mind I had before I met the party. Good heavens, was I, Reginald Hunter, in love with "Janet Smith," one of Cook's Personally Conducted Tourists? The idea was preposterous. I laughed aloud, fancying what my mother would say if I wrote her this piece of news.

And yet—confound it—I dreamt of Janet that night. Getting up early the next morning, after a disturbed slumber, I started out for a long excursion, and telling a small French garçon I met on the doorstep that I should not be home till evening, hastened away for my walk.

When I came back late at night the Frenchman was still on the doorstep. He bowed and seized my stick and coat, giving me this gratuitous piece of information:

"La maison est très tranquille ce soir, monsieur; les Coques sont partis."

CHAPTER II.

RUNNING AFTER HER.

STRANGE perversity of human nature! No sooner was I quite sure of being freed from my enemies than I felt a strong desire to run after them, just for the purpose of asking Janet to forgive me. This was so intensely foolish that I tried to forget the whole episode; tried by a great deal of sight-seeing to drive Janet's image out of my head. And yet why was it that I could so well recollect every feature of her face, and call to mind even the turn of her head and the sweet expression of her deep blue eyes? I still kept wondering at the incongruity of that girl with her surroundings.

Never did a week appear so long to me as that week at Mayence. I was quite sick of it and of the Rhine: heartily glad when I once more moved on, perfectly sure I should not again meet the party—unless, perhaps, on their return journey.

About a fortnight after this I found myself at Lucerne, at the Hotel Swan. As I was idling about the salon I chanced upon a printed paper, and, in large, imposing letters, read, "Cook's Personally Conducted Tour." Then there followed an account of the places they would pass through. I examined the dates. Yes, this was the tour of my identical enemies. I further noted that on a certain day in August they would have seen *all* the beauties of Switzerland, and would pause one day at Geneva before returning home, *viâ* Paris.

Geneva is a very pleasant place just about this time, I said to myself; I may as well go there as anywhere else. But I had only just time to reach it by that special August day. Not that it mattered in the least my arriving by that date, but if I did, it would be a curious coincidence. And let me own to you, reader, that that curious coincidence did take place; for I entered bright, sunny Geneva on the same day that the Hôtel d'Angleterre was expecting a large inroad of visitors. I sent on my luggage by the hotel omnibus, and determined to walk about till nearer the dinner hour.

As I was sauntering along, looking into the shop windows and trying to choose something worthy of the dear mother at home, I happened to pass a pastrycook's shop. How delicious the cakes looked, I thought. And so thought, evidently, a little, curiously-attired lady, who was gazing fondly at the eatables. As I paused she turned round, and I at once recognized one of the "Cooks!" So they were come, and had arrived before me! Pray, reader, do not smile if I own that I at once felt quite friendly towards this old woman. I took off my hat, made a polite bow, and said I believed I had met her at Cologne, and other places.

"Ah! to be sure," she said, anxiously. "Could you tell me, sir, what o'clock it is?"

"Just four," I said, taking out my watch.

"And dinner is not till seven," she sighed. "These foreign ways are most uncomfortable, I think. There's nothing like one's comfortable cup of tea at five o'clock, as all good Christians have in England."

"Why not make up for it by these tempting morsels; though, as you say, they are not worth a cup of English tea."

"Do you think one may?" she asked eagerly, looking up at me gravely. "You see, our conductor does for us altogether, and I don't know, I am sure, whether it's in the agreement."

I nearly laughed aloud, but fearing Janet might suddenly appear round the corner, I refrained.

"I am sure every Englishman is free to spend his money as he likes, and with it you may certainly buy what you like."

"You really think so?" Then her face brightened, whilst I ushered her into the shop, and asked for what she required; and she quite cheered up as "*tourtes de cerises*" and "*gateaux aux éclairs*" disappeared.

"Are the other Coo—the rest of your party at the hotel?" I inquired, carelessly.

"Oh, yes, sir, they are resting. We don't go round the town till to-morrow morning, and we've only Paris to do after this," she added, with a sigh of relief. "I really don't believe I would have come if I'd known the tramping about we had to do—and then none of the meals regular. It's very well for young people; it was my cousin Joe that persuaded me. He came home flush from India, and said he'd treat me. But there——"

"I dare say Mr. and Miss Smith enjoyed it," said I, interrupting her.

"Well, certainly Mr. Smith, he always seemed to enjoy everything. But Miss—dear me, Smith isn't the name. Well, anyhow, I dare say they're both repenting it now, for poor Mr. Smith quite broke down two days ago. Two days, was it? Well, really, sir, I quite lose count of days with this going about."

"Is Mr. Smith ill, then?"

"I don't really know what he is now, sir. I shouldn't be surprised to hear he was in his coffin, for we left him in a dirty bit of a town that wasn't fit for anyone to be ill in."

"And his daughter—is she with him?"

"She's his niece. Oh, yes, she's with him, but she's quite another sort—not fit to rough it in that dirty place."

"But what was the name of the place?" I asked, trying not to show my eagerness. "And why were they left alone?"

"They called it Eagle, or some such name. And as to stopping—why, sir, Cook's parties *never* stop. If somebody drops out, why they do. You see it's all contract work."

She had finished her cakes, and I left her in haste. One idea possessed me. Janet was alone with that man—that uncle; she

might be in difficulty, knowing no one, perhaps not able to speak French. After all, I was not altogether wrong—Janet was not his daughter. I rushed back to the hotel, paid what they asked of me, and took the next train to Aigle. I should get there that evening, and might, perhaps, be of some use. All this time I kept saying to myself that, of course, *anyone* hearing of a young lady left in a foreign land, with a sick relative, would do what I was doing. My mother, I felt sure, would be the first to suggest going to see after them, &c., &c. It is curious how difficult it is to be honest with oneself. I did not ask if I should have done the same had Janet been other than she was.

It was quite dark when I reached Aigle. Moreover, the fine day had clouded over, and it was now pouring with rain. I did not know what hotel Mr. Smith might be in, so that I entered the nearest one, asked if a "Mr. Smith" was staying there, and was answered in the negative.

I hastened out again into the rain, and tried another hotel in the town. There was no Mr. Smith there; most likely he was at the big hotel, a mile out of the town. Courageously I sallied forth, though before I reached my journey's end I heartily wished I had waited for the morning. I arrived at last, wet to the skin, and as I was forced to put up there, changed my dripping things before I asked the question once more. "Was there a Mr. Smith in the hotel?"

Certainly; a stout gentleman who had been ill and a young lady with him. This surely was my Mr. Smith; so I found a card and told the waiter to ask if I might see the lady. I waited in feverish impatience until the waiter came back and begged me to follow him.

I was shown into a small sitting-room lit up with gas; it was empty, but there was a work-basket on the table and several books. I took one up; it was "*Hyperion*;" and this sent my thoughts back to that day on the Rhine when Janet had been so animated about the old legends. In two minutes a side door opened and Janet stood before me. She looked so composed, so self-possessed, that for an instant I fancied our former meetings had been a dream and that we were really old English acquaintances and friends.

"Pray forgive me, Miss Smith, but I fancied—I mean I heard your uncle was ill, and I thought as I was in this neighbourhood that I might be of some service to you. It is so inconvenient in these out-of-the-way places to get what one wants."

She did not hold out her hand; and, looking at her, I feared she had not forgiven me.

"Thank you, Mr. Hunter," she said, stiffly; "my uncle has been ill, but he is a little better now."

"But is there nothing I can do?" I said, eagerly. She was, she must have been a little touched, although she only replied:

"I am sure my uncle will be very much obliged when I tell him you called, but we can have no claim upon your—courtesy." This last

word was brought out with a little effort, yet she looked more fascinating than ever.

"Do pray believe me when I say that I shall be delighted to do anything I can for you. I really mean what I say." My words and the tone of my voice must have expressed some of my feeling, for suddenly Janet became cold and stern.

"I can assure you that I require nothing. Perhaps you forget that we are part of the obnoxious crowd you found so troublesome." She smiled now, whilst I felt quite abashed. Still I could not help fully recognising that had Janet been found among a troop of itinerant players she would still have been a queen among women. Before I found anything to reply she held out her hand as if to make up for her words, saying:

"Good night, Mr. Hunter; I fear my uncle must be wanting me. Will you excuse me?" Then she was gone, and all I could do was to return to my room and meditate how I could best prove to Janet that I would do anything for her. Alas! there was no hiding the fact now: I was desperately in love with this mysterious Janet. I despised myself for it, and my only consolation was that she despised me too.

I woke up the next morning determined to ingratiate myself with Mr. Smith, but for fear of appearing troublesome I waited till ten o'clock before enquiring of the waiter how Mr. Smith was reported to be this morning.

"Better, monsieur. The Mr. Smith and the Miss went away this morning early—the doctor said this air of the city not good for him; so they have gone up to the mountains to a place called Callaz."

What! Janet gone again! Had she done it on purpose? But no, I could not thus far flatter myself. She had only not thought it worth while to tell me their plans.

"I am going to Callaz to-day, garçon. When does the diligence start?"

"At four hours of the afternoon, monsieur."

"Then take my place on the outside," I said; feeling decidedly downhearted, and not a little cross that I should still be intent on following a girl who managed so well to run away from me.

"At all events, Janet shall see I mean what I say," I muttered. And in this frame of mind I whiled away the hours till it was time to start for Callaz.

CHAPTER III.

HOW I STOPPED RUNNING.

THE diligence arrived at last at Callaz, and I descended in front of an enlarged chalet, which I was told was the only hotel of the place. It stood half way up a slope, and behind it towered a mountain.

On walking up to the door the first person I saw was Mr. Smith, seated in the verandah ; but I looked round in vain for any appearance of Janet. There was no coldness at least on Mr. Smith's part towards me, for he received me quite warmly.

"Well, sir, I call this a curious coincidence. It's wonderful, as I said to Janet yesterday, when she told me you had arrived, how friends do meet in these outlandish places. And then to think of your turning up here ! You find me quite a sufferer, Mr. Hunter. It's the gout ; but there's something else, that I don't tell Janet about. It's heart too—that's what the real mischief is."

"I am sure Miss Smith is anxious," I said.

"Bless me, she isn't a Smith ; she doesn't take at all after our race. She was a Morton. Her father married my sister when she was quite young. Young people are foolish, Mr. Hunter ; but my sister Jane was the prettiest girl at Payneton. Mr. Morton was a clergyman ; a very eccentric man ; as full of learning as an egg's full of meat, but no common sense, not a grain. Poor Jane died when Janet was born. She wasn't married above a year, and I lost sight of Mr. Morton and the little one. He was not of our sort, but related to the grand folks, and so brought up his daughter after his own fashion. However, he died at a most inconvenient time, sir. Janet was seventeen, and he didn't leave her a penny, but debts in plenty. He wasn't a bad man either : but, there, it's not our way of providing for children. Well, the grand people didn't want Janet when they saw how she was left, and when I heard of it I came forward. I settled up the father's affairs, and then offered Janet a home. I wasn't at all the thing, and wanted some one to look after me. So Janet came, and a better girl there can't be, though she never gets used to our ways quite. As the doctor ordered me here, I fancied we should be merrier coming with Mr. Cook's party : but it's not her way. She seems a deal happier with me alone, up in these quiet parts."

I was deeply interested in hearing all this. After all, I was not mistaken : Janet was a lady, and had been brought up as one.

"Where is Miss Morton now ?" I asked.

"Well, she ought to be in, for she went up the mountain some time ago, to see the sun set, or something. She needed some fresh air, I told her, for really last night she seemed quite moped."

I rose, saying that as Mr. Smith was anxious, I would go in quest of his niece. Before he could refuse, I hastened away.

More than half way up the mountain was covered with short turf, at first intermixed with flowers and brushwood. Then these ceased, and one came upon overgrown boulders and loose stones, enlivened by the Alpine rose. Further up again vegetation ceased entirely, and the mountain crest rose in bare ruggedness into the sky. Janet would certainly not have reached to that region. She must be seeing the sun set from some grassy slope, for the sky was cloudless. I hastened on. But I found the climbing much more difficult than I

expected, not having waited to provide myself with an alpenstock. I planted my nailed boots firmly into the turf, and progressed steadily.

At last I reached a kind of ledge, or hollow, and turning round for a moment beheld the great snow range of the Mont Blanc, and further back the St. Bernard group flooded in the wonderful crimson glow well known to Swiss travellers, a perfect earthly Paradise. Was Janet seeing it too? I felt sure she would appreciate it. But where was she; had I missed her? Above me rose a very steep bit of climbing and over that another ledge.

Suddenly I saw, high above me, the flutter of a dress. I could not quite distinguish who it was, yet felt sure it must be Janet. I waved my arm, and then, whether she was startled or whether she slipped over something, I know not, but at that minute I saw her fall. She made a violent effort to save herself, but let go her alpenstock, which rolled rapidly away from her. Then, losing all control over her movements, she half slipped, half rolled down the fearful declivity.

I was some way off. Also she was not just above me, but somewhat to the right, where no second ledge would stop her course. In an instant I had made up my mind. I rushed on as fast as possible in a downward direction to the right. In this way I might perhaps reach some point where I could stop her descent. If not, she might be killed or seriously injured by striking against some boulder. I flew on, keeping my eyes on her. Now and then she was partially stopped by some small impediment, but again precipitated downward by the struggles she made to regain her footing.

It takes long to describe, but it did not take many moments to reach a spot below, only just in time to catch at her dress. But alas! I had not had time to secure my own footing; I was dragged by her weight and fell, still retaining my grasp, however. A violent effort, in which every muscle of my body seemed to be exerted, and then I managed to cling to the ground, and throwing out my left arm clutched at a boulder. We were saved; no fear now of again slipping, for curiously enough, against this very boulder Janet's alpenstock had been caught. I secured it, and planting it firmly in the ground, managed to raise Janet. She was for a few moments quite stunned, but happily had not fainted. Very soon she looked up and recognised me.

"Thank you," she said simply; "it was so very horrid going down like that and not being able to stop oneself." She shuddered a little, then with a great effort she rose, but was trembling too much to walk alone. She was thus forced to take hold of my arm and we proceeded very slowly with the help of the alpenstock. I do not think I objected at all to this state of things; I felt so proud of having been of use to her; so proud of having her hand on my arm.

Before we had reached the end of the slope she was forced to sit down and rest, and then I was able to say a few words.

"I cannot imagine how you ventured so high—and alone too."

"I was led on further than I meant to go ; it seemed easy to climb. Besides, everything was so beautiful."

"You might have told me you were leaving Aigle last night," I said suddenly, in an injured tone. Janet looked up with a smile.

"I did not see the use," she replied.

"But if I said that I saw the use?"

"Then you should not ; you must not say that. Oh, Mr. Hunter, indeed you should not have come on, because you are different from us. It is *us*, for though I have been brought up elsewhere, yet my uncle has been so very good to me—so very good—that in future his home shall be my home and his people my people."

I was deeply touched by Janet's noble nature ; it only made me feel how infinitely superior she was to myself, and that her heart agreed with her outward appearance.

We were obliged to proceed, Janet fearing her uncle would be anxious. We found him in a long corridor the end of which had been given up to him, it being quieter than the common sitting-room. Janet went up to him in a gentle, affectionate manner, as he anxiously asked what had delayed her.

"Dear uncle, I missed my footing and—I think Mr. Hunter saved my life."

Mr. Smith poured forth profuse thanks and enquiries, so that I was forced to spend the evening with them, whereupon I found out what a kind, sensible man Janet's uncle was. How was it I could ever have thought him a troublesome neighbour ? When he retired to rest I was left a few minutes with Janet.

"I hope you will believe in future that I am willing to be of use, Miss Morton—and that I shall not find you gone when I wake up to-morrow morning !" This time Janet was not repelling in her voice.

"Perhaps it would be better if we found *you* gone."

"Will you let me be the judge?" and as she did not answer I need hardly say that I did not pack up my portmanteau that night. All my doubts and misgivings had flown away. I loved Janet, and I fancied that this evening she was not quite so indifferent to me.

I had just fallen into a sound slumber that night when I was roused by a loud knocking at my door. "Would I get up and come to Mr. Smith at once?" I hurried on my clothes and was soon at Mr. Smith's door, where Janet met me, looking pale and frightened.

"Oh, Mr. Hunter, forgive me for sending for you, but you said—I went in to give my uncle some medicine at one o'clock, and I called him, but he did not move. I fear he has fainted."

I went in with her to her uncle's room ; the mistress and master of the hotel were there, both being most kind and attentive.

Janet and I went up to his bedside ; I touched his hand ; it was cold as death. I looked in the faces of those about me and then I saw that honest, kind-hearted Mr. Smith would never wake again in this world. Janet burst into tears when she saw the look on my face.

"He was so good, so kind to me," she repeated. "Dear, dear uncle!"

The funeral was very quiet, for Mr. Smith had few relations. His married sister's husband arrived the day of the funeral, much perplexed at finding himself in a foreign land and having a young lady to see after. I wondered how he ever managed to reach Callaz. Janet let me arrange everything for her, and the English ladies at the chalet were very kind to her. It would have been difficult to be otherwise to the gentle, beautiful girl who appeared so lonely.

We learnt to know each other during that week as we could have done under no other circumstances. And when all was over and Mr. Matthew told me he must go back at once, and would give Janet a home till something "turned up," I determined to see if that "something" might not be—I hardly dared to say the word even to myself.

"Will you come and see the sunset once more on this last evening?" I said to Janet. "I promise to see that you do not again fall." Janet was sitting in the verandah, looking sad and dejected. She had tried to avoid me all day, but now she was forced to answer.

"Yes—if you wish it."

When we reached the scene of the accident we sat down, and both of us turned our eyes towards the glorious snow ranges which would soon be flooded with ruby light.

"Miss Morton, why have you avoided me all day?" I said at last, but she only turned her head away.

"Janet," I said, eagerly, making a desperate plunge and taking her hand almost forcibly. "Janet, won't you say that you are a little sorry to leave—this place?"

"I am sorry—very sorry."

"Will you not come back next year and see this same beautiful sight?"

"Next year?"

"Yes, with me. Janet, have I not said that I love you in everything but in words? Those I dared not say for fear of your looking at me as you once did. But now I must speak—Janet, Janet, if you will give me leave, I promise that you shall never regret having come here."

Janet turned towards me with a glowing face, she knew what I meant now, and yet she hesitated.

"But, Mr. Hunter, some day *you* may regret having fallen in with one of Cook's tourists."

"No, indeed, Janet, *never*, if only you will let *me* be in future the *personal conductor*!"

I have not much to add, except that I travelled back with Mr. Matthew and Janet, and that she and I found so much to say to each other, that I am sure the poor man thought us very dull company.

We parted in London—she to accept Mr. Matthew's hospitality till I could arrange "something" for her, and I home to my dear mother, who was almost too much surprised to speak to me when I appeared unannounced. Why had I come home so suddenly? Why had I not answered her two last letters? To these questions I replied by making a clean breast of the whole story, and, though my mother was at first terribly alarmed as to what Janet was like, and in her heart blamed the dear girl very much, yet she would say nothing hastily.

"Mother, you must see her before you blame me. You will find her a lady in every sense of the word, and the only person I ever met in all the world worthy to be your daughter. Besides, did you not tell me to look out for a 'Cook' in my travels?"

My mother being quite the best woman in existence, at once wrote to invite Janet to come and stay with her; and then — but that is hardly necessary to write down. Yet she did say one day:

"Indeed, Reggie, I am quite satisfied with your choice. You could not have obeyed me more suitably."

So Janet and I were married even before I was twenty-five years old, for Mr. Smith had left his niece a nice little income. And if a beautiful, loving and perfect wife can make a man an exemplary creature, then I feel sure I must come under that title. At all events, I know that I have never regretted having fallen in with one of "Cook's Personally Conducted Tours."



A kind of
The world is wide
And Red and Blue may well be
A fellow with you and a fellow
For need they fear
Harm from such contact, each by
Each giving that the other cannot
Owing a power the other may
A living part
Complete when united by the
That binds all difference is a slight
Of light words pure than power
Rivals no tongue; (which in the face

RED AND BLUE.

"So cold!" he said:

"I leave the Blue, though fair and soft the hue,
And choose the Red."

And she replies:

"I leave the Red, which stains the warrior's bed,
For tint of summer skies.

Blue are the distant hills—the land of dreams;
Blue in their limpid flow the quiet streams;

And blue the cornflow'r's eyes.

Blue speaks of joy serene, and thoughtful rest;
Hints at a peace profound in regions blest—
Of love, more tender than a mother's breast,

Which never dies.

Red glows, and flares, and burns itself away;

Leaves only embers of an ashy grey;

Pales with the sunset; fades with fading day—

A mocking bird that flies."

He answered: "Yet

The Red for me!

Deep crimson splendour; type of jubilee;

Of warm, successful love; of liberty:

Colour of blood and fire; of mountain peak

Flushed by the glory of the rising sun;

Showing in loveliest tint on maiden cheek

Dyed with the blush of its own modesty.

The violet

In presence of the rose—that peerless one,

Confesses, with bowed head, her charms outshone.

Red, darling of the Tropics, loves the light;

Blue hides in shade; her home in gloom and night."

A third voice broke in here:—

"The world is wide,

And Red and Blue may well live side by side,

A gallant bridegroom and a gentle bride.

Nor need they fear

Harm from such contact, each by each more fair;

Each giving that the other cannot yield;

Owning a power the other may not wield—

A fitting pair;

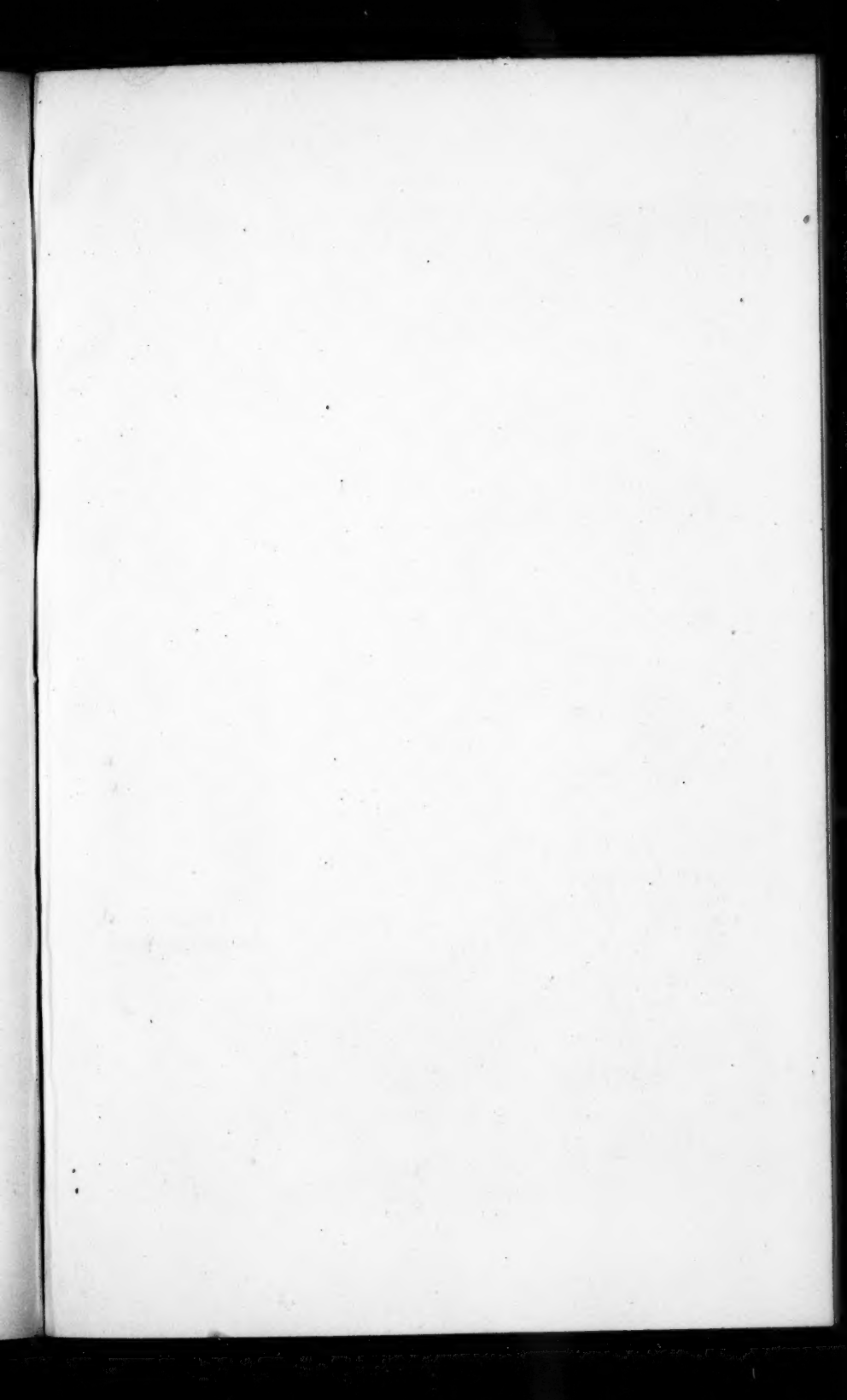
Complete, when wedded by the golden bond

That blends all difference in a single ray

Of light more pure than purest diamond

Rivals no longer; twain in one for aye."

EMMA RHODES.





M. ELLEN EDWARDS.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.